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Rzeszotarska-Nowakiewicz*

The Nidajno Style

Sources, Inspirations, and Examples
of a Romano-Barbarian Aesthetic
Convention from Late Antiquity



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Warszawa

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From the author

The former Nidajno Lake is indeed the first place in Poland where traces of an ancient cult site have been recorded using modern research methods – this, owing to the weapons and elements of warriors' personal equipment that were intentionally and intensively cast into the waters. The uniqueness of this site, which the excavation results clearly confirm, is closely related to the phenomenon of the famous Scandinavian sacrificial sites, known for centuries (and recognized for decades). Naturally, the Nidajno site is not without its own telltale manifestations. Although it will be possible to fully define them not until some future date – that is, once a wider source base has been obtained – it is already now possible to identify the particularities of this site. In addition to the observations that can be attributed to the initial stage of research, there are also elements that have confirmed Nidajno's importance beyond the regional level. They predispose Nidajno to the role of a site that indirectly linked the Northern European, Baltic *Barbaricum* with the distant Roman world. The cultural differences between the two zones were enormous, and although there are traces of long-distance relations linking them, from the perspective of the archaeological material they were rather one-sided and typical of the standard links between centres of civilization and the distant periphery. This picture has been enriched by the discoveries made in the Mazurian bogs.

The reason for this is the singularity of the site, defined by the juxtaposition of several factors: form, location, and the specificity of the artefacts. The type and workmanship of some of the items found in the marsh is astonishing, especially those belonging to a set of silver, gilded, and *niello*-decorated fittings which in all likelihood originally adorned the parade equipment of a Roman commander. These differed radically from the local Baltic (and, more generally, Barbarian) standard, with features that illustrate the high level of craftsmanship and quality possible in the specialized workshops of the ancient world. The present publication is the first substantive study of these artefacts, as well as the first analysis of a separate category of finds from Nidajno. The discoveries making up its material basis were accumulated over three survey and reconnaissance excavation seasons (2010–2012), and they have been meticulously examined for their stylistic and iconographic features in modern archaeology's fullest workshop. The proposal presented here is, however, not only an elaboration of the material acquired so far, as it also tables an analytical solution envisaged for future use.

Paradoxically, it can be argued that the discovery of Nidajno should not have come as a surprise, since the idea of the existence of a site between the North and the South, proving direct communication between representatives of the Barbarian elites in these areas, had long been entertained by researchers. The only problem was that there was no clear indication of its precise location in the vast spaces between the Danubian Roman *limes* and the Baltic littoral. The presence of sites with sacrificial weapon deposits in what is now northern Poland had also long been expected, and

it was rightly assumed that the zone of the occurrence of similar sites extended beyond Scandinavia. Indeed, the power of the phenomenon attested by these deposits was believed to transcend the regional, cultural, and ethnic boundaries of the time. It is in this context that the discovery of the site at Nidajno fits better into the intuitively perceived picture of the dynamic world of Late Antiquity than the picture that had been developed on the basis of previous research.

In 2012, after having explored and documented the cultural and natural peculiarities of the site and having defined the methodological principles that should guide further exploration, excavations at the Nidajno site were halted. This decision was not only correct, but necessary. It was justified by the rapid increase in the number of materials, despite the fact that the research, which was essentially exploratory in nature, was being carried out cautiously, i.e., within a limited spatial scope and taking into account the challenges posed by the identification of organic materials and the conservation of numerous metal artefacts (which, as it turned out, required a long and multi-stage process). In the following years, however, analytical work was carried out on the technology of the production of selected finds, extensive non-invasive studies of the site were carried out (geophysical and GPR surveys), and the characteristics of the local palaeoenvironment were identified (palynological and sedimentological analyses). The order of these works also included the preparation of the present publication and the groundwork for further studies – for in the near future, fieldwork at the site is slated to resume. Together these activities will make it possible to present the phenomenon of Nidajno in all the complexity of the research problem inherent in it, illustrating not only the fascinating picture of the ancient world at the site of this fascinating confluence of the Empire and the *Barbaricum*, but also the possibilities of modern archaeology.

I wish to warmly thank Dr hab. Tomasz Nowakiewicz (Faculty of Archaeology, University of Warsaw) for handing over to me the most prestigious artefacts found at Nidajno for examination and elaboration – as well as for his time, creative criticism, lengthy discussions, suggestions, and editorial contribution to the present work. I would also like to thank Dr hab. Jacek Andrzejowski (State Archaeological Museum in Warsaw), Dr Marcin Biborski, Dr hab. Anna Bitner-Wróblewska (State Archaeological Museum in Warsaw), Dr Ruth Blankenfeldt (Centre for Baltic and Scandinavian Archaeology, Schleswig), Dr Ivan Bogdanović (Institute of Archaeology, Serbian Academy of Sciences, Belgrade), Dr hab. Adam Cieśliński (Faculty of Archaeology, University of Warsaw), Prof. Claus von Carnap-Bornheim, Prof. Dr hab. Andrzej Kokowski (Institute of Archaeology, Maria Curie-Skłodowska University), Prof. Dr hab. Bartosz Kontny, (Faculty of Archaeology, University of Warsaw), Dr Maxim Levada (National Museum of the History of Ukraine), Prof. Dr hab. Adam Łukaszewicz (Faculty of Archaeology, University of Warsaw), Prof. Dr hab. Magdalena Mączyńska, Dr Magdalena Natuniewicz (Institute of Archaeology and Ethnology PAS), Dr hab. Marzena Przy-

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1. Introduction

1.1. Scope and objective

This book aims to define a significant aspect of a new phenomenon observed during archaeological exploration of the Nidajno Bog in Mazury in 2010–2012. This is the first site in Poland where modern archaeological methods revealed vestiges of cultic or religious practices from the Roman Period, ones involving the sinking of valuable and prestigious elements of personal effects into a body of water. The research results presented here are based on the collection of unique silver and gilded jewellery unearthed during the dig and which constitute – alongside various elements of arms and armour – an emblematic component of the corpus of finds from this site.

Their scientific value exceeds what is typical for Roman Period sites from the Northern European *Barbaricum*, as they suggest the existence of a new type of link between this part of the continent and the Classic Civilization on the other side of *limes*. The pertinent finds will be described and subjected to archaeological comparative analysis, here expanded to include indispensable stylistic-iconographic studies. The conclusions will shed light on various phenomena once taking place in the dynamically changing realm of Roman-Barbarian contacts – a meeting point of disparate cultures.

Nidajno Style takes into account comparative materials from all over the European *Barbaricum* and nearby Roman Provinces – mostly from those along the Danube and Rhine rivers. It draws upon the accumulated knowledge from decades of studies into the development of the social structures and material culture of Barbarian communities of Central and Northern Europe, along with the material, organizational remains of the Roman army and its use of troops of Barbarian background. An additional element is the relatively new research trend involving analysis of the technical aspects of finds that leads to a reconstruction of crafting techniques. In this context, the examination of selected artefacts from Nidajno are of a preliminary character.

It bears emphasizing that studies of the issue raised herein face limitations primarily due to the unsatisfactory state of the relevant research and publications, as well as to the relatively low number of finds offering diagnosis. This does not detract from the relevance of the subject area, but rather imposes a postulative nature on certain aspects of the research.

1.2. Style and stylistic analysis – introduction

When undertaking research into the styling, technology, and symbolical relevance of depictions on archaeological finds – such objects often being small pieces of utilitarian art – one cannot leave unmentioned the tools already developed by art historians and theorists. Foremost is the system

for description, as it provides an ordered analysis of complex and multifaceted works of art (mostly paintings and sculptures), and is also used in studies of richly decorated utilitarian items from Late Antiquity unearthed during archaeological exploration.

What do we understand by “style”? Using the simplest definition from a history of art textbook, style is a fixed set of features and formal relations found in the works of a particular artist, allowing the work to be characterized, or to be assigned to a specific era, cultural trend, or school. Style is also used to denote sets of features characteristic for a certain historical period. At this point, style (and here we limit ourselves to material culture only) becomes a cultural phenomena, an expression of a specific ideological setting existing in a specific time and area, and reflected in architecture, painting, sculpture, utensils, garments, etc.¹ In the visual arts, the conceptual designer of style will be a collection of works sharing the same formal characteristics. Nevertheless, besides the similarities within every style, we also find certain differences. Over time permanent relations between a style and the themes and content it uses have been discovered, thereby leading to a sharper definition of “the structure of a piece of art”² (Zwolińska, Malicki ed. 1990, 288).

Integrally connected with such a definition of style are concepts such as “stylization”, i.e., the action of making the form conform to an *a priori* adopted decorative principle, and “motif”, a discernable, repeatedly used compositional element, e.g., in an ornament (Zwolińska, Malicki ed. 1990, 188, 288). An ornament is a decorative motif that may be used singularly or be regularly repeated in a specific rhythm. It is used to enhance the aesthetical value of items, at times symbolically expressing their purpose and function³ (Zwolińska, Malicki ed. 1990, 211–212).

It also bears mentioning that the notion of style, originally from art studies, is currently universally used in other areas of the liberal arts, archaeology included. Just as with many other terms used in the liberal arts, here too no single definition applies, even though questions relating to

1 The term “style” was introduced into the theory of the visual arts in the late 16th century to denote an individual’s manner, or that of a specific work of art; this new meaning became widespread from the middle of the 17th century.

2 The structure of a piece of art is the sum of all the relationships predominant within a structure, the elements of which gain meaning and significance from the fact that they form a whole; this whole is determined by the mutual relationships between said components. The structure of a piece of art goes beyond the links between purely formal elements, but includes the ties between various “layers” of the piece, including those from the sphere of content (Zwolińska, Malicki ed. 1990, 287).

3 Ornament has been a companion of all types of artistic expression since its conception. Its visual forms, although discrete for every epoch, are easily borrowed and adapted by various art forms and different techniques. Ornament constitutes the basic criterium used to identify stylistic character, and even to date individual works. Various types of ornament are distinguished, e.g., anthropomorphic, i.e., drawing upon the human form; geometric, using geometric forms; floral, with motifs of leaves, flowers, sinuous boughs and tendrils; and zoomorphic, drawing upon animal forms. Composition schemes exhibiting serial motifs in a strip include antemion, beading, and cymatium (also known as egg-and-dart). Ornamentation (otherwise – decoration) is a set of ornaments used in a given period and place (Zwolińska, Malicki ed. 1990, 212).

stylistic and utilitarian patterns in material culture underlie many archaeological theories and practices. Since the 1960s the theory of style has been the subject of discussions constituting a distinct strand of research in the theory of archaeology. The principal issue rests with how to define it in a way that satisfies scholars representing such diverging positions as cultural evolutionism, processualism, and constructivism (Boast 1997, 173). The definition of style has been tackled from the viewpoint of various trends of theoretical archaeology: processual (i.a., Binford 1965; Sackett 1977; 1985; 1990; Wiessner 1985; 1990), postprocessual (e.g., Hodder 1990; 1991; Tilley 1991; Shanks, Tilley 1987; 1992), evolutionist (Dunnell 1978; Hill 1985; Braun 1995), and behavioural (Carr, Neitzel 1995; Schiffer 1996). Numerous theoretical papers are devoted to this question, be they of an archaeological, anthropological, or informational nature (i.a., Conkey, Hastorf 1990; Boast 1997; Wobst 1977; 1999; Domingo Sanz, Fiore 2014).

The concept of style is relevant for the archaeology of art, as in the process of creating objects and structures differing in form, colour, size, texture, volume, etc., one may often discern repeating patterns, i.e., evidence of underlying stylistic principles and habits. Thus, studying style touches upon many aspects of the creation and presentation of images, including trends in designing visual motifs, their combinations and arrangement, the techniques used in their crafting, the types of objects and contexts in which these images were created and presented, purposes envisioned by their makers, and the impressions they made on users (Conkey, Hastorf 1990; Domingo Sanz, Fiore 2014). Style is also an analytical tool used by archaeologists to indicate visual similarities between works of art and to prepare maps showing their spatial distribution and stylistic sequences (Domingo Sanz, Fiore 2014). Margaret W. Conkey and Christine A. Hastorf characterized the prevailing approach thus:

What we term style, regardless of how we may define it, is omnipresent in society. Style is included in every archaeological analysis, even if indirectly. It is precisely style which creates and defines types of objects, cultures, or even types of evolutionary trajectories. Style operates – and may be studied – on the level of the individual, of the group, or of an entire society (Conkey, Hastorf 1990, 1; cf. Wobst 1977; Sackett 1977; 1985; Wiessner 1985; 1990).

Hence style plays a significant role as a tool in determining social identity and in establishing relative chronology when dating artefacts. Absolute dating is relevant for identification of artistic traditions, for ascribing them to specific periods and areas, and in studying interactions between specific human groupings and other aspects related with information exchange networks and their evolution over time (Domingo Sanz, Fiore 2014, 7108; more literature there). In order to acquire such data the products of human industry have to be systematically described, their salient features quantified and compared – moreover, must be examined with an eye for similarities and differences. In the act of creation an artist may make various choices – either consciously, or by following a set of instructions learned in a specific context. Thus, in order to interpret an artist's actions it is necessary to “deconstruct” the creation process (Domingo Sanz, Fiore 2014; more literature there).

The study of an object's formal features is usually performed by visual examination, with systematic recording of various descriptive categories, these being dependent upon the nature of the piece of art in question and quantification of the frequency of their prevalence in order to determine if these change over time and/or space. Such categories include: types of motifs (i.a., geometric or figurative), shape (proportions, modelling, perspective etc.), size, and formal spatial relations (types of compositions and scenes). Analysis of motifs should be accompanied by analysis of their arrangement so as to identify the principles behind the composition. The next step is to analyze technological features, i.e., the materials used and the techniques of craftsmanship. The selection of materials, tools, and materials for the making of joiners and dyes, the surface to be decorated and the manner of its preparation, and finally the very techniques – all this is guided not only by the artisan's skill and access to materials and specialized tools, but also by cultural practices (cf. Beck, Steuer 2005; Capelle 1982; 2012; Pesch 2007; 2012; 2015; Bitner-Wróblewska, Pesch, Przybyła 2020, 229–230). The visual aspects of an object may be imitated across various cultures, while non-visual elements, such as alloys, formulas, are more difficult to emulate, hence their analysis may be used to examine more stable aspects of social identity. Another element is identifying an item's purpose, both utilitarian (related with its material usage) and non-utilitarian (connected with social, ideological, or spiritual spheres). Here context analysis is key. Every comprehensive stylistic study should combine formal, functional, and technological analysis and place the style in time and space (Domingo Sanz, Fiore 2014; more literature there).

The description and interpretation of a piece of art's subject matter (symbolical as well) is the domain of iconography. In the 1930s iconography became a method which, by combining the analysis of style with iconographic analysis, was to explain the symbolical and allegoric depictions used in ancient art. From this point of view, iconographic description comprises a part of iconology, which here is considered to be a method for reading an art object's subject matter via deciphering the meaning of the symbols used. In such an approach iconography examines symbols, with the focus of iconology being the subject matter of a piece of art. These two fields overlap in the way they analyze the historical, political, and often also the philosophical context in which a given symbol functioned (cf. Conkey, Hastorf 1990).

One of the pioneers of this approach was Erwin Panofsky, whose method of studying an art object's content involved three stages of uncovering various semantic layers of a presentation: pre-iconographical description, iconographical analysis, and iconological analysis (Panofsky 1939; 1971). The pre-iconographical description aims to identify motifs (i.e., the main thematic elements), the carriers of straightforward and symbolical meanings. Configurations of forms are used to create objects (items, animals, humans), while the arrangement of objects depicts events (a chase, hunting, a romantic scene etc.). A full pre-iconographical description should identify all motifs and their meanings used in the specimen studied. Iconographical analysis, drawing upon the results of pre-iconographical description and acquired source knowledge, allows for the un-

ravelling of the secondary meaning of the motifs and compositions. At this stage motifs may be split into images, symbols, and attributes, whereas composition into personifications, allegories, and anecdotes. Iconographical analysis is a funnel of sorts, as it uncovers meanings understandable inside a specific culture or cultural complex. The final element of the process is iconological analysis. The features of an art object which it uncovers acquire a symbolic meaning, a meaning specific to a given culture, thus placing them in a broader context. In effect the piece of art becomes an expression of its times and/or the artist's preferences – or maybe those of the artist's patron. Iconology examines pieces of art in the context of their cultural space, and classifies and compares them with other similar works.

Certain elements of the above-described classical iconological method may be used in the analysis of archaeological artefacts – naturally, with an allowance for the limits stemming from the character of such material. The authors of this method were staunch opponents of superficial and emotional rapture over works of art, of idealization of art as such, and of ignoring or deprecating art's role inside culture. Their view was that a scholar should treat art objects not as a source of aesthetical sensations, but as a document of a specific – at times highly complex – process. In order to “read” such a “document” one must know the cultural context of the time and place in which the work arose. Such a requisite is difficult to meet for archaeological artefacts exemplifying “barbarized” or “barbarian” ancient art, as the number of variables⁴ in such a cultural context is incomparably higher.

The set of unique fittings from Nidajno, owing to their lavish ornamentation and zoo- and anthropomorphic depictions, makes an excellent starting point for not only stylistic, but also iconographical analysis. Yet this requires taking a look at various elements of the complex setting of two distinct worlds – the Classical and the Barbarian, whose relations in Late Antiquity determined the cultural shape of the Continent. Another complication that makes such an approach even more challenging is the character of archaeological sources – due to their very nature these come with a set of limiting reservations, though at the same time they offer cognitive possibilities rarely encountered in other fields of science.

1.3. State of research into ornamental styles of the Central and Northern European *Barbaricum* and their cultural context in Late Antiquity

The broad scope of research areas addressed in this work calls for drawing upon a wide set of sources and publications. Although the relations between societies on both sides of the *limes* have been the object of intensive scholarly interest for decades (centuries even!), examining them in the specific context of the interregional transfer of trends in styling is a new development, one dating to the last few decades, that necessitates a careful and meticulous approach. The impulse to commence studies

⁴ State of research, state of preservation of object, context of discovery, possibility of laboratory analysis etc.

into this issue came with the surprising discovery of a set of unique items from the sacrificial bog at Nidajno. The analysis of those artefacts opened new dimensions in the seemingly already well explored universe of relations between the Roman Empire and the North European *Barbaricum*. However, in order to study these finds, to place them in their appropriate cultural context, and to table answers to several related research questions, one must examine the cultural changes on both sides of the *limes* and consider the great complexity of the Barbarian side, undergoing dynamic changes in Late Antiquity. Such a broad scope for the problem area renders the vast bodies of data obtained in sundry locations incomparable. Nevertheless, several key issues in such a broadly sketched research area may still be identified.

For the materials to be analyzed, what is particularly relevant are catalogues of selected artefact categories from the Northern European *Barbaricum* area, including belt fittings (Madyda-Legutko 1986; 1992; 2011) and Almgren Group VI fibulae (Jakubczyk 2013; more literature there), and various types of weapons (Kontny 2021; 2023; see literature there). For Roman belt fittings (Böhme 1986; Deschler-Erb 1996; 1999; Hoss 2010; 2014; Künzl, E. 1994; 1998; Madyda-Legutko 2016) and ceremonial elements of armour and horse tack, publications focusing on such materials from the *limes* zone were used (Bishop 1991; Coulston 1990; Bishop, Coulston 2006; Garbsch 1978; 2000; Deschler-Erb 1999; 2012; Nicolay 2007; Lau 2014a). As concerns provincial Roman metal ware types, synthetic works and updates to our knowledge of this area and the territory of the Chernyakhov culture were consulted (Eggers 1951; Künzl, S. 1993; Erdrich 1995; Lund Hansen 1987; 1995; 2016; Becker 2010; 2016; Luik 2016; Petrauskas 2021; Petrauskas, Didenko 2022).

There is a unique category of sites illustrating the military potential of Barbarian communities (and the elite character of selected examples of panoply), thereby posing at the same time a functional analogy for Nidajno. These are the North European sacrificial bogs with mass cult deposits (cf. Jørgensen, Storgaard, Gebauer Thomsen ed. 2003; Ilkjær 2007). In the last few years many analytical elaborations of the materials, combined with a synthesis of broader issues, were published, ones covering sites such as Nydam (Bemmann, Bemmann 1998; Rau 2010a; 2010b; 2013; Holst, Nielsen eds. 2020), Porskjær (Nørgård Jørgensen 2008), Ejsbøl (Ørsnes 1988; Nørgård Jørgensen, Andersen 2013), Vimose (Christensen 2005; Pauli Jensen 2008; 2009), Kragehul in Denmark (Iversen 2010), and Thorsberg in Germany (Carnap-Bornheim 1997; 2014; Blankenfeldt 2015a; Lau 2014a; Matešić 2015). These publications complement the monumental series dedicated to the analysis of finds from Illerup Ådal in Denmark (Ilkjær 1990; 1993; 2001a; Carnap-Bornheim, Ilkjær 1996a; 1996b; 1996c; Biborski, Ilkjær 2006a; 2006b; Pauli Jensen, Nørbach 2009; Bursche 2011; Kokowski 2019; currently 15 tomes edited/co-edited by J. Ilkjær). The necessity for compliance with stringent scientific standards means that we should not expect further monographs of sacrificial bogs anytime soon. This problem area is rounded out by data on similar, although smaller scale (also in the non-military context) practices from other parts of the

Central and North European *Barbaricum*: Pomerania (Grabarczyk 1996; Mączyńska 2000; 2001; 2015; Nowakiewicz ed. 2016b; Kontny et al. 2016; Kontny 2022; 2023), the lands occupied by Balts (Bliujienė 2010; Rādiņš 2012; Kontny 2015; Nowakiewicz ed. 2016a; Nowakiewicz 2015; 2017; Rzeszotarska-Nowakiewicz et al. 2024), and Estonia (Oras 2010; Oras, Kriiska 2013).

The cultural context of the Nidajno site during its occupation is quite well known due to the satisfactory state of knowledge of the Bogaczewo Culture – the main cultural complex in Mazury during the Roman Period. This culture is well covered by several analytical and synthetic publications that present its features and dynamics of changes (Nowakowski 1995; 2007; 2009; 2013; Bitner-Wróblewska ed. 2007; ed. 2009; Bitner-Wróblewska 2007, 2009; 2010; Karczewski 2011; Szymański 2005; 2013; Iwanicki, Juga-Szymańska 2007; Juga-Szymańska 2014; Bitner-Wróblewska, Rzeszotarska-Nowakiewicz 2016a; 2016b; Karczewski 2020; there older literature). Here one should note that ongoing excavations at Bogaczewo Culture sites in areas around Nidajno keep on adding to our knowledge .

Artefacts from the burials at Wrocław-Zakrzów (formerly Sackrau-Breslau; found in 1886., cf. Grempler 1887; 1888; Kramarkowa 1990; Quast 2009a; 2009c; 2014, 2016) and Pielgrzymowo, powiat nidzicki (formerly Pilgramsdorf; explored in the late 1930s and 1940, cf. Bohnsack 1937; 1938; Lau 2012; 2014b) also are of great relevance in the analysis of finds from Nidajno. Sadly these are known exclusively from archival documentation⁵. Other analogies – a group of finds from Ukraine – were discovered by illegally-operating detectorists, hence their archaeological context is unknown. These facts significantly add to the difficulties of a synthetic cataloguing of materials from Nidajno.

The degree to which the former zone of the *limes* and adjacent areas of Barbarian settlement have been archaeologically explored (including publication of research results) in various countries is uneven. Publications concerning the Rhine and Upper Danube areas (cf. Deschler-Erb 1999; Nicolay 2007; more literature there) are much more numerous than those covering the Lower Danube. Studies into eastern areas, i.e., the Pontic and Bosphoran zones, also are less advanced. Here the best studied are Chernyakhov Culture materials (cf. Гороховский 1988; Щукин 1999; Щукин 2005; Магомедов 2001; 2010; 2016; 2022; Magomedov 2011; Малашев 2000; Гопкало 2008; Петраускас 2009; Шаров 2011; Мызгин 2013; 2016; 2018; Гопкало, Милашевский 2017; Любичев, Мызгин eds. 2018; Lyubichev, Myzgin 2020; Петраускас, Магомедов 2023; Петраускас et al. 2023). The first synthetic cataloguing of Roman military

5 These items were lost during World War II, hence data on them contained in academic publications cannot be verified. Here the artefacts from Wrocław-Zakrzów are analyzed using the publication by Wilhelm Grempler (1887; 1888), photographic documentation at the Wrocław City Museum and the galvanized copies from the Römisch-Germanisches Zentralmuseum in Mainz (cf. Quast 2009a). The illustrations of finds from Pielgrzymowo are copies from their first publication in 1938 (Bohnsack 1938) and reconstructed using archived documentation from the Museum für Vor- und Frühgeschichte in Berlin (Lau 2012).

equipment from the Crimea, from the passage of the 1st century BC to the 1st century AD is the doctoral dissertation by Maria W. Novichenkova (Новиченкова 2017). Such a disparate state of knowledge makes drawing unequivocal conclusions more difficult and calls for wariness.

There is a striking contrast between the solid coverage of the phenomena of interregional decoration styles from the Migration Period, such as polychrome (Böhme 1974; 2000b; Zasetskaya 1982) and the Sösdala, Untersiebenbrunn, and Nydam styles (cf. Haseloff 1981; Bitner-Wróblewska 2001; 2005; 2017; Hilberg 2009; Näsman 2017; Pesch 2007; 2009; 2015; Quast 2009b; Bitner-Wróblewska, Pesch, Przybyła 2020; there older literature), and the much more modest research into the much more highly individualized similar phenomena from the Roman Period (cf. Pesch 2015). Among the latter, most interest was directed at the *Römisch-Germanischer Mischhorizont* (Carnap-Bornheim 1997; forthcoming; Blankenfeldt 2008; 2015a; 2015b; Przybyła 2018). A monumental and highly detailed work is dedicated to the phenomena of decorating items with pressed gold foils in the Northern and Central European *Barbaricum* in the Younger and Late Roman periods (Przybyła 2018). One of the reasons behind this discrepancy in the state of knowledge is the growing dynamism of changes in the 2nd quarter of the 1st millennium (and slightly later as well) in the *Barbaricum* and the increasing cultural homogenization that supplanted previous regional differentiation. Among phenomena chronologically associated with the Late Roman Period and which may be regarded as a supra-regional standard, there is the horizon of monumental burials at Leuna-Hassleben-Stráže-Zakrzów (Kokowski 2001; Czarnecka 2004; Przybyła 2005; Prohászka 2006; Becker 2010; Kolník 2012; Quast 2009c; 2014; 2016; there older literature). The latest archaeonumismatic works greatly adding to available data on the movements of Barbarian tribes from the Goth cultural context and their interaction with the *Imperium Romanum* are based upon finds of aureus coins taken by Goth war bands at Abrittus in 251 AD and their barbarian copies minted in Goth milieu using stamps looted during Gallienus's reign (253–268; Bursche 2013; 2014; 2016; Мызгин 2016; 2018; Bursche, Niezabitowska-Wiśniewska 2018; Bursche, Myzgin [Мызгин] 2019).

The results from technological analysis of the Nidajno finds (cf. Nowakiewicz ed. 2016a) allow for detailed reconstruction of the advanced goldworking techniques used to craft these objects. At present these are original reference data, as there are no appropriate comparative materials which could be used to establish the degree of technological standardization or the uniqueness of their make (Nowakiewicz ed. 2016a; Nowakiewicz, Rzeszotarska-Nowakiewicz 2019; in preparation).

2. History of the site's exploration

The sacrificial site at the former Lake Nidajno near Piecki (Mragowo District, Warmia-Mazury Voivodeship; Ill. 1), registered in conservation-agency documentation files as “Czaszkowo, site 1”, has featured several times in publications (Nowakiewicz, Rzeszotarska-Nowakiewicz 2012; Nowakiewicz 2015). In Antiquity it was the site of ceremonies involving the sinking of weapons as well as other valuable and prestigious elements of warrior equipment. This was carried out on a significant scale, as evidenced by the large number of finds – over 300 – coming from a small area¹. The fragments of weaponry are accompanied by numerous objects from Roman workshops made from precious metals of the highest quality, highlighting the importance of those ceremonies and the high stature of this location in the former *Barbaricum*.



Ill. 1. Location of site at Nidajno near Piecki (Mragowo District, Warmia-Mazury Voivodeship; edit. A. Rzeszotarska-Nowakiewicz)

¹ The excavations in 2010–2012 explored 150 m², this constituting some 2% of the area of the western bay of the former lake. The digs were accompanied with surface exploration which added to the total number of finds items torn from their natural context by drainage works and later strewn over the area.

2.1. Up to 2010

Up until the 2010 dig, the bog site at Nidajno was not known to scholarly publications. To some degree it could be linked with unpublished archival data prepared by Hugo Gross in the 1930s informing about the discovery of Pleistocene fauna remains “in the Czaszkowo (Zatzkowen) lake”. The topography of the area (Table 2) and the context of discovery in an aquatic environment quite strongly point towards Lake Nidajno (cf. Nowakiewicz, Rzeszotarska-Nowakiewicz 2012, 30, footnote 23). One could even hypothesize that the discovery had been made during drainage works in the area, first in the lake’s neighborhood and then on its former bottom. It may not be ruled out that this was in fact the place where the famous Neolithic harpoon had been found – namely, the item presented at the Berlin exposition of materials of the Physikalisch-ökonomische Gesellschaft zu Königsberg in 1880 labelled as “from Petschendorf [Piecki]” (Album 1880, pl. VI.172)², though today such an assumption can be neither proven nor disproven.



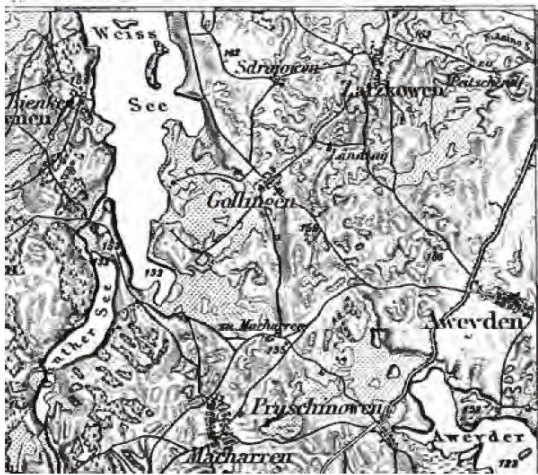
Ill. 2. a. – Surroundings of Lake Nidajno in 2019 – bird’s view (Photo M. Bogacki); b. – boggy section of the site (Photo T. Nowakiewicz)

Owing to the small number of finds, the district school counselor and author of the archaeological map of the Kreis Sensburg (Mrągowo District), Georg Johann Friedrich von Hassel, did not record the place of their discovery around Piecki and Czaszkowo³. Here it should be mentioned that the map made by Hassel in the 1930s shows low lying meadows in place of Lake Nidajno –

2 This location is further suggested by the fact that several times the large Lake Wągiel – close to Piecki – was identified as the place where artefacts had been discovered. In light of that location being favourable for the preservation of organic items, it may be presumed that it was discovered in Lake Nidajno, then undergoing intensive drainage works (or in the “Piecki” segment of the Dajna River).

3 Original examples of the maps are found at the Museum of Warmia and Mazury in Olsztyn, Mrągowo Branch, and the Wojciech Kętrzyński Museum in Kętrzyn. More on map content, see Mellin-Wyczółkowska 1999.

the outcome of successful drainage efforts (Ill. 3). This points to the lake being drained somewhere between the end of the 19th century and the first decades of the 20th⁴



Ill. 3. a. – Fragment of map by G.J. Hassell (Collection of the Museum of Warmia and Mazury in Olsztyn, Mrągowo Branch);
 b. – Nidajno and neighbourhood on a map from the 1880s (Grossblatt, sheet 168: Ortelsburg)

4 Lake Nidajno is still featured on a map from the 1880s (Grossblatt, sheet 168. Ortelsburg). It is difficult to pinpoint the exact moment when it was fully drained. While touring this area just before World War I Mieczysław Orłowicz mentioned nearby “meadows, where the now drained Lake Wągiel used to be” (Orłowicz, year of publication not given, 131). Although this has no connection with Lake Nidajno two kilometres away, nevertheless it suggests that drainage works could have been carried out in the first half of the identified time period (and doubtlessly before the large projects carried out in the southern districts of East Prussia immediately after the 1920 Plebiscite).

Available data suggest that these works did not produce any archaeological finds that could be associated with the Nidajno site. In light of the well-developed and functioning system of collating and passing on information about “national antiquities” discovered in East Prussia, it is unlikely that such discoveries would have gone unreported⁵. This is further supported by the lack of mention in the register in C. Engel’s archive (elaborated by R. Grenz)⁶ – with the said register failing to mention Nidajno at all, though it did record finds from surrounding areas.

Wartime damage and post-war neglect led to drainage works affecting the lake and surroundings areas needing to be performed for a second time. Such work was carried out, with varying intensity, from the 1960s down to the ‘80s. According to official documents at the Olsztyn City Waterworks (*Zarząd Melioracji i Urządzeń Wodnych w Olsztynie*), Mrągowo Branch, such works were carried out both in the bowl of the lake and in the valley of the inflowing Dajna River. The project was completed in stages and with the use of heavy machinery. The end result was that lake was drained and the waters of the Dajna began to flow through a straight canal. Since the mid-1980s the lakebed is again inundated, this being a decision of the land’s owner⁷. Thus in at least one aspect the state of the area as it had been before drainage works was restored, as most of the lakebed is again under water; the exception is the former western bay, partly drained to enlarge the adjacent pastures (although a small part is a waterlogged wasteland). The impact of the Dajna’s canalization had incomparably greater consequences, as it led to the complete transformation of the previously boggy – and probably difficult to access – valley into pastures.

The draining of the western bay has a bearing on the formal side of the organization of archaeological exploration there. At the junction of the main water body and the now dry bay a bridge was built over the Dajna river, with the country road passing over this bridge and forming the administrative border between the villages of Piecki and Czaszkowo. Thus the area to the west of the road and bridge is part of Czaszkowo village, while that to its east – of Piecki, in effect producing the official name of the site. Starting exploration of the site a mere few tens of meters to the east would have produced a different official name for it – “Piecki” and not “Czaszkowo”. In light of plans to extend the range of exploration in that direction it

5 This system was operating efficiently up to the final days before World War II, as evidenced by the account of discovery of a body of a girl at Drwęck in Olsztyn District (*Mädchen von Dröbnitz, Kr. Osterode*), on July 15, 1939 during drainage works being carried out by the Reichsarbeitsdienst.

6 Query by A. Rzeszotarska-Nowakiewicz in Schleswig, collection of Museum für Archäologie Schloss Gottorf, Landesmuseen SH.

7 Thus Lake Nidajno legally became a pond and its name disappeared from the official list of lakes in Poland. Hence the lack of consequence in naming this body of water in various cartographic labellings. In fact, usually no name is given at all, although lately Google Maps began to use the name “Jeleń” – from the name of the nearest hamlet, though this is baseless in historical or administrative terms. This is why the current lake – even though again filled with water – is herein called “the former Lake Nidajno”.

would be advisable to eliminate scope for unclarity in this regard – hence the term introduced “Nidajno” seems to be the optimal scientific, geographic, and topographic identifier of the site.

2.2. After 2010

The first information about Nidajno’s secrets came with the handing over of two precious metal finds to the Mrągowo Branch of the Warmia and Mazury Museum in Olsztyn – namely, a belt fitting and an unidentified fragment of an openwork object. However, the direct impulse to explore the site was provided by stories – popular among the local inhabitants – about “old, corroded iron” found near the lake (the stories occasionally including mention of some mysterious gold item found there years ago⁸). A clearer picture became possible through the efforts of local explorers and of Dariusz Żyłowski, the head of the Mrągowo Branch of the Museum of Warmia and Mazury in Olsztyn. At this point it is worth mentioning that up to the start of the dig at Nidajno this area was not included in the Archaeological Picture of Poland programme (in Polish, AZP – Archeologiczne Zdjęcie Polski).

The archaeological activity at the site conducted in 2010 had a limited scope, i.e., only that of a survey-reconnaissance. Nevertheless, it localized the site, identified its character, cognitive value, state of preservation, and establish the logistical-equipment needs of further exploration. These observations were verified during the first seasons of digging, as the first trench was excavated in a place very heavily damaged during drainage works⁹.

The second season of archaeological exploration in July 2011 produced an incomparably larger number of finds and much more detailed stratigraphic and sedimentological data. For the first time exploration touched upon the undisturbed stratigraphic structure of the site (in the shore area of the former lake; Ill. 4). These findings permitted the development of appropriate methodical assumptions used to organize work on the site. This also led to a more realistic assessment of the logistical and financial requirements for continued exploration of the site.

The third digging season took place in July 2012 and, besides providing further artefacts, resulted in a better understanding of the character of different parts of the site (Table 5).

8 Attempts to verify this venerable story, both in various institutions and among individuals once involved in drainage works, did not bring about any concrete results – besides confirmation of the robustness and extensive range of stories about the supposed “gold find” at Piecki. Nevertheless this short-on-facts fable cannot be dismissed as pure fantasy.

9 This was most likely a site of post-war works. The location fits the area marked for drainage in plans stored at the Olsztyn City Waterworks (Zarząd Melioracji i Urządzeń Wodnych w Olsztynie), Mrągowo Branch. In the trench itself, besides first order material evidence such as ditches, pipes, layers of debris used as fill, there also are vestiges such as tire marks of heavy earth moving machinery used for this work. This, naturally, affects the state of preservation of artefacts unearthed there.

Exploration continued to focus on the littoral area, although exploratory research was extended to zones more distant from the shore – the western bay¹⁰ and the main body of water¹¹.



Ill. 4. a. – Relicts of corroded iron artefacts; b. – Palmetto fitting *in situ* (Photo T. Nowakiewicz)

10 The geomagnetic survey carried out by mgr. Wiesław Małkowski from the Institute of Archaeology UW covered an area of over 0.5 ha. Interpretation of the findings requiring discovering the key to properly read the plan of anomalies, part of which required archaeological verification. “Decoding” the anomalies proved to be surprisingly difficult in light of the inaccessibility of the terrain and unfavourable soil conditions (acidic and heavily saturated with iron compounds).

11 Underwater exploration by a team of scuba divers headed by dr. Bartosz Kontny from the Institute of Archaeology UW as a field trip for IA students. It focused on the western part of the lake, the closest to the explored nearby littoral area of the western bay.



Ill. 5. Work at Nidajno site in 2012 a. – draining a trench; b. – exploration of sedimentation layers (Photo T. Nowakiewicz)

Additionally, extensive surface exploration was done, both in areas directly abutting the site, as well as those in a broader radius. These took various forms¹², aimed at gathering a maximum wealth of data about the settlement background of the site.

All works were carried out by research teams from the Institute of Archaeology, University of Warsaw¹³ (involving nearly 50 students) and the Institute of Archaeology and Ethnology, Polish Academy of Sciences, assisted by numerous volunteers (including prospectors with metal detectors). Mragowo and Piecki's local authorities assisted these surveys, aided by the generous consent given by Halina and Tadeusz Załęski – the owners of the land where the site is located, as well as of Katarzyna Swat, owner of the agrotourism establishment “Nad Świętym Jeziorem”.

On 10–13 May 2012 Mragowo and Piecki (the localities directly neighbouring the site – and thanks to courtesy of Katarzyna Swat) hosted a several-day long international conference, *Sacrificial Lake in Czaszkowo (Masuria). Traces of Unknown Cults and Interregional Contacts of Balts in Late Antiquity*, during which information about the discoveries at Nidajno was for the first time put into broader scholarly circulation. This was aided by the presence of several dozen scholars from eleven countries who represented important scholarly circles researching the final stages of Roman influence in the Northern European *Barbaricum*.

In 2019 non-invasive exploration – on a larger scale than during previous seasons – continued. Some 2.5ha of the lake's former western bay and shoreline were prospected via magnetic geophysical methods¹⁴. This was complimented by a georadar survey of some 0.5 ha¹⁵. Additionally, the area was photographed from the air and a digital terrain model made¹⁶.

In 2019 and 2020 several steps to reconstruct the palaeoecological context of the site were undertaken. These included the taking of numerous samples by drilling from the glacia, the bottom of the Dajna valley, and the lacustrine sediments. The following year, geochemical and palynological samples were analyzed by a team of sedimentologists and palynologists¹⁷, the results of which are currently being prepared for publication. In this very period a graphical reconstruction of the

12 The surveys were carried out at different times of the year, focusing on e.g., a search for archival sites (localization of cemeteries at Babięcka Struga, the Białe and Dłużec lakes), locating the headwaters of the Dajna and verification of photographs made from an ultralight (two flyovers) by mgr. Krystian Treła.

13 Today, the Faculty of Archaeology UW.

14 Study by prof. Krzysztof Misiewicz and mgr Wiesław Małkowski from the Institute of Archaeology, UW.

15 Study by dr hab. Radosław Mieszkowski from Faculty of Geology, UW.

16 Photographs from drone made by dr Miron Bogacki; digital terrain model by mgr Wiesław Małkowski (both from the Institute of Archaeology, UW).

17 Sedimentological studies were conducted by: dr hab. Ewa Smolska, prof. UW, dr Dorota Giritat, dr hab. Piotr Szwarczewski (all from the Faculty of Geology, UW), whereas palynological studies were carried out by prof. dr hab. Mirosława Kupryjanowicz and dr Magdalena Fific (Faculty of Biology, the University of Białystok).

site was made. All the above mentioned work was carried out as part of the grant “Non-invasive surveying of the former cult site at Lake Nidajno in Mazury – extent, threats, palaeocological background” (*Nieinwazyjne rozpoznanie dawnego miejsca kultowego w jez. Nidajno na Mazurach – zasięg, zagrożenia, tło paleoekologiczne*), from the Ministry of Culture and National Heritage (grant no.02227/19/FPK/NID implemented with funds from the Foundation of the Friends of the Institute of Archaeology, University of Warsaw¹⁸).

In spite of the extensive exploration, to date the limits or size of the site remain unknown, with their identification being prime research objectives. The exploration of the site is unquestionably in its infancy.

¹⁸ Grant supervised by dr. hab. Tomasz Nowakiewicz (Institute of Archaeology UW). Expression of gratitude for dr hab. Roksana Chowaniec, Chair of the Foundation.

3. Material Findings

3.1. Overview of the Nidajno finds

The character of the archaeological material from Nidajno is determined by the site's function and the cult practices performed there. These included not only the deposition of items in the bog, but also the pre-deposit intentional damage done to them in various manners (namely – visible signs of burning, cutting, chopping, and breaking). This is apparent in the fact that the number of damaged items (hereafter, 'destructs') greatly outnumber undamaged ones – this being one of the defining features of the assemblage from Nidajno. This is not without impact on the typological – and at times even functional – identification of the most heavily damaged items. Such identification is even more difficult for fragments permanently fused by corrosive processes, as this precludes closer examination of individual elements – a situation often noted for Nidajno artefacts.

The numerically largest category of finds are military-related, with a predominance of heads of different kinds of pole-arms. Overall 103 artefacts of this type were catalogued: 33 fully or partly preserved (with surviving, even if fragmentary, sockets and blade or barbs), 40 fragments of blades from such heads, and 30 fragments of shafts (cf. Rzeszotarska-Nowakiewicz et al. 2024). Nine examples of double-edged sword blades were found; such a number still should be regarded as well above the average in relation to the spearheads. This category includes an almost complete specimen, lacking only the point, made with the pattern welding technique (Kosiński, Rzeszotarska-Nowakiewicz, Nowakiewicz 2016). This blade could be linked with the unique elements of a sword's panoply: two lavishly decorated gold fittings (of quillon and scabbard neck) and sword bead¹. In contrast with those "showy" items, the standard of the times is better represented by the bronze C-shaped sword scabbard foot. The list of military-related items is complemented by five fragments of shield bosses (including flange and spikes) and (which also should be regarded as another defining feature of the site) 20 fragments of mail armour of varying sizes, but all sharing similar technical parameters. And finally 15 fragments of different sized knives, including some for civilian use.

Another category of finds and which may be related with military equipment are elements of horse tack and equestrian equipment. A large part of these share certain technological, typological, and stylistic characteristics, thus giving grounds to the term featured in the title of this work – Nidajno Style. This category is composed of nine lavishly decorated, silver, gilded, and *niello* blackened belt fittings (probably) from horse tack, and most fully preserved. These include four standardized, rectangular appliques or fittings, two buckles, one belt mount, and two strap

1 These artefacts were discovered in different parts of the site, but it should be noted that the gold sword fittings and sword bead were found in a secondary deposit, probably found during land reclamation.

mounts that exceed standard size and degree of ornamentation. These fittings are accompanied by a silver, openwork strap divider, a fragment of a box phalera, two fragments of iron bow spurs, and three fragments of horse bits (one shank and two snaffles) – all made with similar techniques. The horse tack category potentially also includes two bronze rings, but at the current stage of research this remains to be established.

Formally unconnected with armaments or equestrianism, yet linked with such items in another manner, is a group of prestigious objects used to communicate wealth and power. A spectacular example is the silver and gilded figurine of a bird (a vulture or an eagle?) attached to an iron shaft. That last feature strongly suggests this item being a *signum* used to denote an individual's rank or function. A green glass chalice, two melted down fragments of which were found in the bog deposits of Nidajno may have served a similar function (Rzeszotarska-Nowakiewicz 2016; Syta, Wagner 2016; Wajda 2016).

Compared with the numerous finds of military- and equestrian-related items, the number of elements of dress, jewellery, and other equipment is relatively sparse. Here we have 11 buckles, a large majority fragmentarily preserved, although one stands out as completely preserved– a silver piece with ferrule, as well as four belt fittings. Also recorded were five bronze tendril brooches and 20 fragments of fibulae, presumably of the same type (although in the case of several destructs – mostly of fibulae pins – any sort of typological identification is impossible). This group of finds concludes with two bronze bucket pendants, a comb fragment, and a fragment of a whetstone.

The inventory of finds from Nidajno also includes objects eluding precise identification, yet with features suggesting their classification as “technical”: fragments of nails, rivets, flat fittings etc. Such items number 46. Additionally, there are 38 destructs of objects made from bronze alloys (including sheet, flat fittings, fragments of unidentified jewellery, melted down lumps), along with 17 silver objects (most showing signs of some melting, occasionally melted lumps of raw materials). Overall the complete inventory of finds from exploration in 2010–2012 consists of 329 catalogue entries. Considering the assemblage of destroyed objects and items permanently lumped together by corrosion oxides, this number in fact should be considered somewhat higher.

3.2. The assemblage of finds defining the Nidajno Style

The inventory of finds from Nidajno includes a particularly salient group of objects, all made to the same strictly defined specifications. Their shared characteristics go down to the level of materials and techniques used in their making, even though the principal defining feature are the common presentations and ornament motifs used to decorate items of standardized size and proportions. The sum of those attributes suffices to undertake the challenge of defining the term providing the title of this volume: *Nidajno Style*.

The objects presented had been found in various spatial contexts (but inside the limits of the explored area) and at different sediment depths of the littoral of the ancient lake². The order of presentation follows formal classification criteria (buckles, standardized size belt fittings, non-standard fittings, items serving other functions: a fitting which probably had been a belt fitting, and a strap divider).

No. 1. Buckle with a ferrule

Buckle with ferrule, silver, gilded, and *niello* coated, partly destroyed by fire. D-shaped frame, decorated with a row of *niello* filled triangular stamps, with two zoomorphic depictions of long-necked bird heads. Prong with metope attached to the frame axis. Ferrule attached to frame with two metal strips wrapped around it, fastened with two rivets. Lavishly decorated ferrule: the main motif is a gilded, detailed depiction of a lion walking left, on *niello* blackened background. Anatomic features (mane, fur, nostrils, eye, etc.) marked and emphasized by various stamps. The blackened field is delimited by golden, stamped bordering. The edge of the ferrule is emphasized with a unique manner of faceting made with *niello* filled semi-circular stamps. The extremities are destroyed by fire: the back of the buckle ferrule totally, and the lower fragment of the buckle frame partly (melted and severely distorted).

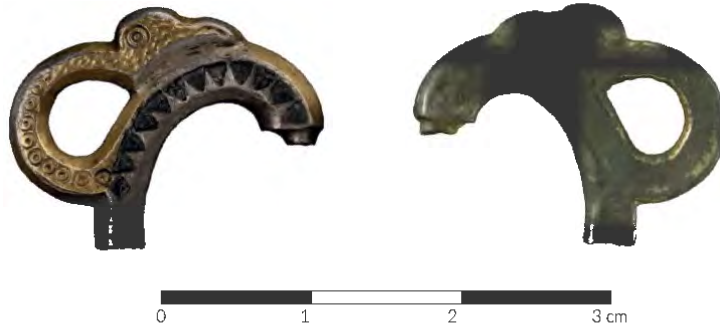


No. 1. Silver, gilded, and decorated with *niello* buckle; ferrule with depiction of lion. Preserved length 5.4 cm, Width of ferrule 2.2 cm, thickness 2 mm, buckle height 3.4 cm, buckle width 2.1 cm, length of prong 1.8 cm, weight 20.9 g. (Photo M. Osiadacz)

² Two of the artefacts presented below (nos. 3 and 10a) were found prior to field research in 2010 and are part of the collection of the Museum in Mragowo, a branch of the Museum of Warmia and Mazury in Olsztyn. Thank you for making these finds available for study and publication.

No. 2. Fragment of buckle

Upper part of buckle frame, silver, gilded, and *niello* coated. D-shape frame, gilded, decorated with a row of triangular stamps filled with cut solid *niello*, with zoomorphic depiction of long-necked bird head. Anatomic features of body covering marked with stamps. External edges profiled, inner facing flat and unornamented. Fragment fully analogous to buckle with ferrule (no. 1), chopped into pieces and free of fire marks.



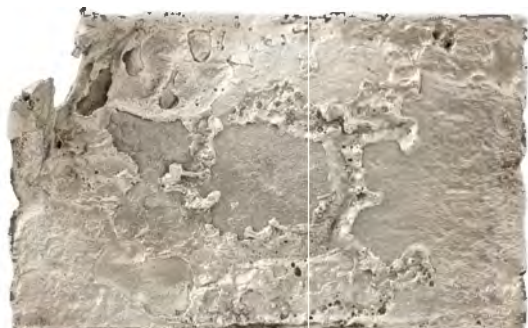
No. 2. Fragment of silver, gilded, *niello* coated buckle decorated with zoomorphic motif. Width of buckle 1.8 cm, Preserved height 1.7 cm, width of frame 4 mm, thickness of frame 3.5 mm weight 3 g. (Photo M. Bogacki)

No. 3. Fitting with zoomorphic presentation (“fitting with lion”)

Rectangular fitting, silver, gilded, and *niello* coated, with small section destroyed by fire. Lavishly decorated: the main motif is a gilded, highly detailed depiction of a lion walking right, placed on a *niello* blackened background. Anatomic details (mane, fur, nostrils, eye, etc.) marked and emphasized with several different punches. The blackened section is delimited with a gold ribbon bordering with stamps. The edge of the fitting is highlighted with a specific type of faceting made with crescent *niello* filled punches. The depiction of the lion is analogous to the ornamented ferrule of buckle no. 1, but reversed – here the animal is walking right. Marks of fire damage visible in the destroyed corner of the item.

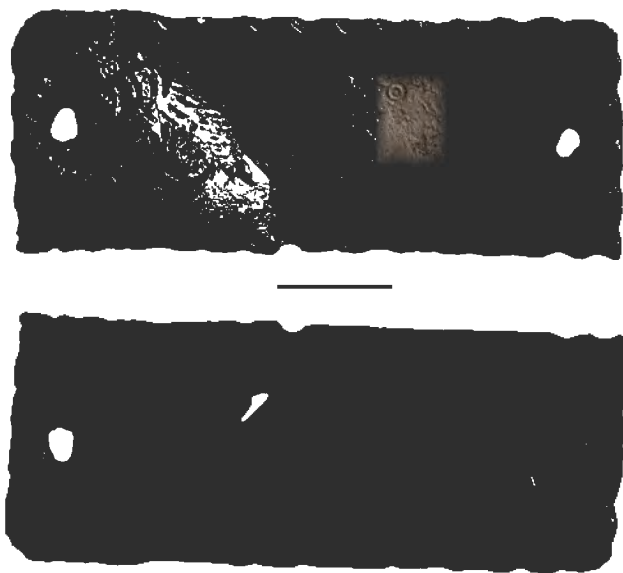


No. 3. Silver, gilded, *niello* ornamented fitting with lion. Length 3.5 cm, width 2.2 cm, thickness 2 mm, weight 7.1 g. (Photo M. Osiadacz)



No. 4. Fitting with zoomorphic presentation (“fitting with a pair of animals”)

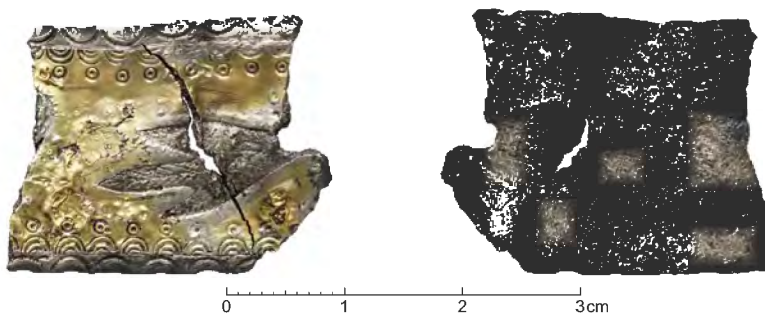
Rectangular fitting, silver, heavily damaged by fire, preserved in two fragments. Some discernible vestiges of ornament – the main motif is a pair of two animals walking left: a lion and an unidentified creature with elongated snout or beak and horns, ears or feathers, and with one or two pairs of limbs (a bird of prey?). Marks on the edges of the fitting suggest faceting analogous to that of the “fitting with lion” (no. 3). Details of lion made analogously to depictions of the same animal on fitting no. 3 and the buckle with ferrule no. 1. Intensive heating of the item led to the almost total destruction and severe obliteration of iconographic content. On the longitudinal axis there are two openings with unknown purpose (possibly, although not very likely, evidence of repairs).



No. 4. Silver, fire-damaged fitting with pair of animals. Length 5.4 cm, width 2.2 cm, thickness 2 mm, weight 12.5 g. (Photo M. Bogacki)

No. 5. Fitting with zoomorphic presentation (“fitting with tail”)

The central section of a rectangular, silver, gilded, *niello* coated mount, subject to fire and (probably) mechanical damage, Preserved in two fragments. Lavishly decorated fitting: the main motif is a three-partite bird’s tail (?), fragmentarily preserved, originally it was probably *niello* coated and placed on a gilded background. The edges of the gilded backdrop are highlighted with two rows of different stamps (border in the form of a pattern), parallel to the edges of the whole fitting, faceted with *niello* filled semi-circles.



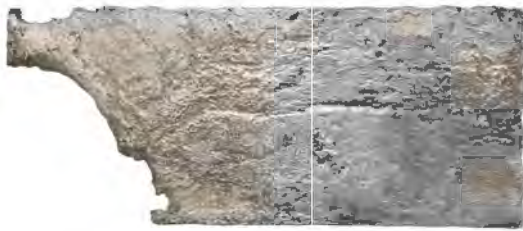
No. 5. Fragment of silver, gilded, and *niello* decorated fitting with tail. Preserved length 2.7 cm, width 2.2 cm, thickness 2 mm, weight 5 g. (Photo M. Osiadacz)

No. 6. Fitting with geometric pattern

Rectangular fitting, silver, gilded, and *niello* coated, partly fire damaged. A lavishly decorated object, with entire surface covered with a geometric pattern on a gilded backdrop. The pattern was made with three different stamps and four rows of *niello* filled rhomboids, placed spatially along the long axes. The edge of the fitting faceted with *niello* filled semi-circle. One corner is completely destroyed, with neighbouring corner strongly heat-affected, with ornament melted off.



0 1 2 3cm



0 1 2 3cm



0 1 2 3cm

No. 6. Silver, gilded fitting with geometric ornament. Preserved length 5.2 cm, width 2.2 cm, thickness 2 mm, weight 9.8 g.
(Photo M. Osiadacz)

No. 7. Large fitting with zoomorphic presentation (“fitting with beasts”)

Large, rectangular fitting, Silver, gilded, and *niello* coated, in small part fire damaged. The main motif is a composition with five animals: four facing right – and one left, confronting the others. The depictions of the animals are gilded and stamped with several different punches emphasizing anatomic details (scales, fur, eyes, nostrils etc.), placed on a *niello* blackened surface. The blackened field was delimited with a gold ribbon border with two rows of stamps. The edge of the fitting highlighted with a row of semi-circular *niello* filled stamps in reverse arrangement than on other

objects, i.e., with the semi-circular segments facing outward. Anatomical details allow the identification of a dolphin and mythological beasts – a capricorn, two gryphons, and what is probably a dragon. The fitting was reinforced with two parallel silver strips attached to the inner facing, along the longer edges. The item bears few marks of fire damage (minor melting of upper edge and signs of the *niello* boiling in the centre of the object).



No. 7. Silver, gilded, decorated with *niello* fitting with zoomorphic pattern. Length 15.5 cm, width 3.5 cm, thickness 3 mm, weight 91.6 g. (Photo M. Bogacki)

No. 8. Large fitting with anthropo- and zoomorphic presentation (“palmetto fitting”)

A large, completely preserved palmetto-shaped fitting (a stylized tree), silver, gilded, and *niello* coated. The main motif is composed of an arrangement of zoomorphic patterns and details placed on the object’s edges. The central element is a gilded depiction of a hippocampus, placed on *niello* blackened surface with a finely profiled shape. The pattern is surrounded by a uniquely designed broad edge of the fitting, made from gilded S-shaped elements arranged in waves (around six symmetrically placed circular openings) with triply-repeated tops in the form of stylized heads of birds of prey. Smaller bird heads were then positioned between these tops, this time placed on the original, i.e., silver surface of the object. The crown of the fitting (i.e., the crown of the stylized tree) is made from five profiled elements, arranged like a fan, alternatively silver and gold/gilded (additionally *niello* on the most elevated, ridge fragment of the relief). The trunk of the stylized

tree carries the main motif of the silver hybrid on a gilded background: the creature is standing on two cloven legs, has a human head with a horse head growing out of it; the gilded background is additionally ornamented with a pattern of cuts and stamps arranged into triangles crowned with crescents. The edges of this segment of the fitting (i.e., the trunk of the stylized tree) is faceted with *niello* filled semi-circles. The object's iconographic content was presented using complementary, complex techniques and procedures, i.e., the contrastingly arranged depictions of the creatures and shapes, where large openings along the sides are used to form the stylized heads of birds of prey. Please note that the manner whereby the motifs are placed does not conform to the object's "top" and "bottom".



No. 8. Silver, gilded, decorated with *niello* palmetto fitting with anthropo- and zoomorphic pattern. Total length 14 cm, length of rectangular section 5.4 cm, width 2.2 cm, length of "crown" 8.6 cm, max. width 6.3 cm, thickness 2 mm, weight 62.7 g. (Photo. M. Osiadacz)

No. 9. Mount with eyelet

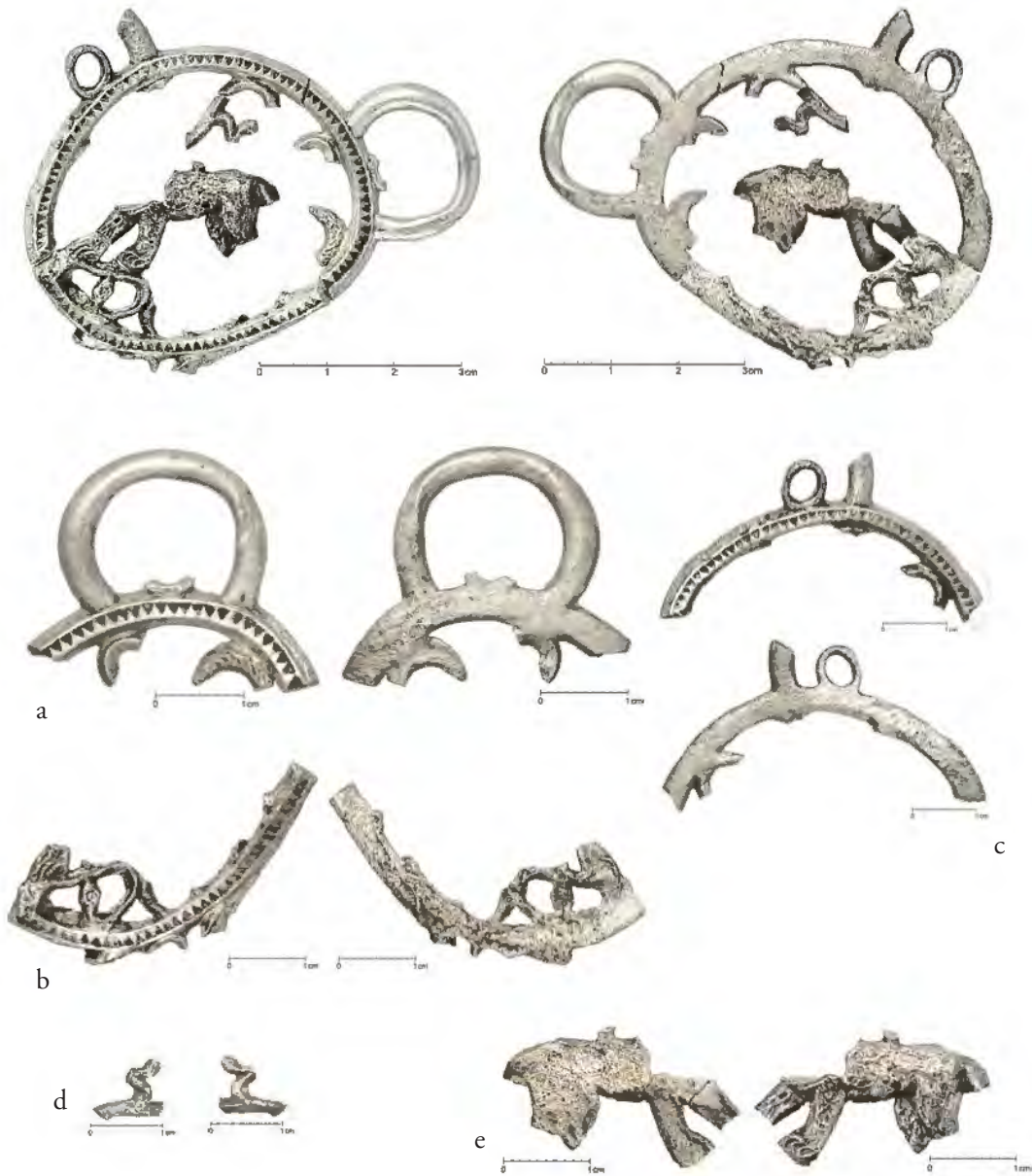
A fully preserved rectangular belt mount, silver, gilded, and *niello* coated, made from profiled sheet bent in such a manner that the two equal size plates are connected with a large, slightly narrower eye. The main motif is a gilded, detailed depiction of a fish, placed on a niello blackened background. The body is covered with scales, with three triangular fins: two dorsal and one ventral. The tail is symmetrically split. The texture of the tail and fins is emphasized with parallel etched lines, while the eye was punched with a bi-circular stamp. The head is set apart from the body with two curved lines. Only a single, outer facing of the object is decorated. The edge of the mount is highlighted with *niello* filled semi-circular stamps. The belt was attached to the mount with three silver rivets binding the two plates.



No. 9. Silver, gilded, and decorated with niello fitting with eyelet and depiction of a fish. Total length 4.1 cm, length of flat segment 3 cm, width 1.4 cm, sheet thickness 2 mm, eyelet diam. 1 cm, weight 9.6 cm.
(Photo M. Osiadacz)

No. 10. Strap divider

Silver, gilded openwork strap divider, in large part destroyed (broken, cut, and with fire marks), reconstructed from seven fragments discovered at various parts of the site. Circular, with three regularly placed eyelets on the external rim. The eyelets are double, with a smaller eye inside a larger ring. The whole ring is made from profiled sheet, decorated without a row of *niello* filled triangles. Inside the ring a detailed depiction of a lion (incomplete due to the damaged state of object), the main decorative motif. The anatomical details (preserved fragment with fur and claws) made with stamps and fine etching.



No. 10. Silver, gilded, and decorated with niello strap divider reconstructed from fragments (a–e). Reconstructed diameter 5 cm, frame width 4 mm, frame thickness 4.5 mm, weight 26.2 g.
 (Photo M. Osiadacz)

All the above fittings are of comparable size, of similar proportions, and evince a regularity of decorative elements. The discernible care for details, the meticulous depiction of anatomic details of the beasts (whether actual or fantastic), the contrastive colour arrangements (silver, gold, patinated silver, *niello* black) all give the impression of intended elegance, this being their defining feature. They also share the same crafting methods, and the same gold-working techniques and tools (an observation proven for punches; cf. Nowakiewicz ed. 2016a).

3.3. Selected finds unrelated with the Nidajno Style

Some finds do not bear the features of the Nidajno Style, yet are relevant for the study of the style and chronology of silver accessories. These consist of the gold sword scabbard neck [no. 11] and quillon fittings [no. 12]), sword bead (no. 13), gilded silver bird figurine (no. 14), silver box phalera (no. 15) and silver buckle (no. 16).

No. 11. Gold fitting of sword scabbard neck

The scabbard neck fitting was made from thick, formed gold sheet. A rectangular opening cut into the central part of the plate. Profiled and cut (bead wire) golden wire was soldered to the edge. The face of the fitting was decorated with gold floral and faunal appliques from matrixes. The space between these appliques is filled with fine punched ornament. The zoomorphic motif is the presentation of two pairs of walking lions shown in profile. These are flanked with a repeated floral motif (lotus?). Depictions of birds visible in the four corners. The inner facing of the fitting is unornamented.



No. 11. Gold fitting of sword scabbard neck. Height 5 cm, width 4.6 cm, slat width 4.5 mm, rectangular opening height 2 cm, width 1 cm, weight 50.2 g. (Photo M. Osiadacz)

No. 12. Gold fitting of sword quillon

Gold sheet forming the quillon fitting is lense-shaped from above and rectangular when viewed from the side. The core of the quillon is not preserved (probably made from organic material). The external surface of the fitting was covered with thick gold sheet with deep, punched geometric patterns, with a pattern of birds and dolphins in an antithetic arrangement. In the central part, a pair of birds with two vines between them. The externally placed pairs of dolphins are separated by shells. The spaces between the shells are ornamented with lense stamps. The edge of the sheet is highlighted with thick, triangular bordering. On the top, flat, and convex surface of the quillon an impression of a sword scabbard fitting is visible, the shape of which conforms to the neck fitting no. 11. One corner melted.

The same punched patterns and stamps being repeated on the sword scabbard neck (no. 11) and quillon fittings (no. 12) are proof that these objects came from the same workshop. The impressed profile of the neck fitting on the quillon fitting points to these being elements of the same weapon.



No. 12. Gold fitting of sword quillon. Length 6.2 cm, width 2.4 cm, height 1.2 cm, opening length 3 cm, width 9 mm, weight 19 g. (Photo M. Osiadacz)

No. 13. Quartzite sword bead

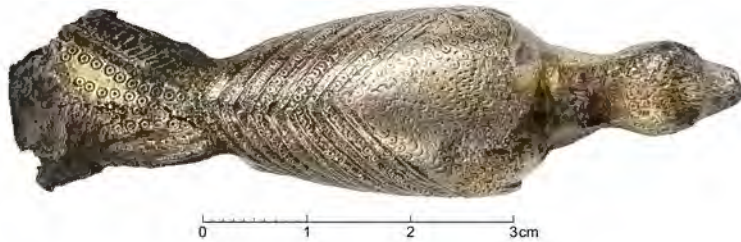
A fragmentarily preserved item. A circular quartzite disc, both sides lightly convex. The surface is unevenly cracked and discoloured and shows marks of heating. Its use as a pendant is evidenced by the remains of an iron wire laced inside the object, probably used as fragment of an eyelet's fastening, as well as traces of ornamentation (metal cladding?) of the hole (cf. Rzeszotarska-Nowakiewicz 2016).



No. 13. Quartzite sword bead. Reconstructed diameter 5.6 cm, eyelet diameter 8 mm, height 1.3 cm, weight 30.6 g. (Photo M. Osiadacz)

No. 14. Silver, gilded figurine of bird on iron shaft

A bird figurine, silver, gilded. The item is cast, thick walled, hollow. The wings are furled, a well-marked neck, and its beak is bent downward. Details of feathers, flight feathers, and rectrices are engraved. The surfaces of the wings, tail, and head are covered by a pattern of regularly arranged stamped circles with dots. The eyes are made from a black mass into which copper alloy balls were embedded to mark the pupils. Legs without details of build. In the lower torso, between the limbs, a rectangular opening. The uneven surface of the leg endings points to the figurine once being attached to some other object. The ornamentation from stamped circles and dashes and the manner of representing the bird's nostrils are analogous to the style of zoomorphic depictions on the silver belt fittings. The item is partly heat damaged. The bird's neck shows marks of several intentional cuts. The item's proportions and front-heaviness preclude it being set up in a standing position. An iron shaft was excavated alongside the figurine, and may be related with it (e.g., used to attach it to some other object).



No. 14. Silver, gilded figurine of bird on iron shaft. Length 8.1 cm, max. width 2.2 cm, height 4.2 cm, weight 64.7 g. (Photo M. Osiadacz)

No. 15. Fragment of silver, gilded phalera

Fragmentarily preserved boxlike phalera, showing marks of mechanical and heat damage. Made from profiled silver sheet. Outer facing with traces of gilding. The external, vertical wall of the phalera has remains of rectangular, antithetically placed openings.



No. 15. Fragment of silver, gilded phalera. Reconstructed diameter 4 cm, height 1 cm, thickness 2 mm, weight 5.7 g. (Photo M. Osiadacz)

No. 16. Silver buckle with ferrule

Silver, two-part buckle with oval, faceted frame with granular, hexagonal cross-section, with prong whose base is decorated with impressed ornamentation of five cross-wise dashes. The precisely made fixed pin/shaft with circular cross-section was cast together with frame. The square ferrule was attached with two rivets, and hammered on the inner facing.



No. 16. Silver buckle with ferrule. Total length 3.2 cm, ferrule length 1.6 cm, width 1.5 cm, frame height 2.5 cm, frame thickness 4 mm, prong length 1.7 cm, weight 6.4 g. (Photo M. Osiadacz)

3.4. Technology behind the ostentatious items from Nidajno

Fittings nos. 1–10 from Nidajno share – and are defined by – the manner of their creation. All flat accessories (nos. 1–9) were cast from silver in forms, with smaller elements crafted by hammering. Chemical analysis shows a very high finesse of the alloy used for fittings and ferrules (940–970/1000; Nowakiewicz, Rzeszotarska-Nowakiewicz 2012; Nowakiewicz ed. 2016a). Gold elements were made from thin foil and placed on a silver backing, joined first by mechanical pressing, and then by heating or soldering. Details were applied by stamping and engraving. The regular edges of gilded elements, their contouring and minimal relief in relation to the silver backdrop, is discernable. Analysis of the metal identified traces of mercury, pointing to the use of fire gilding, a widespread art during the Roman Period (cf. Armbruster 2019, 10–12). This is still perfectly visible on the large and relatively well preserved fittings with mythological beasts (nos. 7 and 8). Metallurgic analysis points to the gilded elements having been made from gold alloy with 94–98% finesse. The box phalera was made from silver alloy, with a higher concentration of iron, tin, or lead in some areas versus that of tin alone in others: this may be the effect of there once having been some unpreserved iron element attached to the phalera with tin solder. The traces of gold and mercury in turn suggest it was once coated by fire gilding (Nowakiewicz, Rzeszotarska-Nowakiewicz 2012; Nowakiewicz ed. 2016a; Miśta et al. 2016a).

The preserved fastening fragments of large fittings (nos. 7 and 8) and the results of metallurgical analysis provide grounds for reconstructing the manner of their assembly. The best example is the

fitting with five beasts (no. 7), where only the four corner-placed rivets, with semi-spherical heads, pass through holes in the face-plate. The remaining rivets were made separately, from silver shafts, with tails flattened by hammering. These were placed with the tails on the bottom of the plate, along the edges, and covered with another plate from copper alloy with openings aligned with the rivets. The plate was covered with soft solder and placed along the back of the silver faceplate. After delicate heating the binder permanently fused the ornamented facing with the rivets and the backplate giving it the desired stiffness. Such layered construction increased the number of rivets, reinforced the item, and allowed for its solid mounting. Only a thusly formed fitting was then fixed to some surface (the preserved 2-3mm wide slit suggests the use of leather or cloth). The assembly was finished by using the rivets to attach silver strips. This is indirectly confirmed by results of metallurgic analysis. Indentations in the backs of destroyed fittings show increased concentrations of lead, suggesting that when the item was again subject to heat it disintegrated, making the lead contained in the solder react violently with the silver backing, forming small pits. In the large fitting no. 7 thermal damage is also visible along the edges (Nowakiewicz, Rzeszotarska-Nowakiewicz 2012; Nowakiewicz ed. 2016a; Miśta et al. 2016a).

Examination by microscope of stamped surfaces points to hot-stamping, performed on heated metal. Common elements of decorating silver fittings are foremost the profiled and punched crescent shaped indentations at the edges of the plates (“postal stamp pattern”), where the concave edges are additionally highlighted with *niello*. The borders and internal fields of the more elaborate designs of the “palmetto” (no. 8) and “large fitting with five beasts” (no. 7) are further accentuated with “bordering” made with smaller stamps forming small concentric circles or, in the case of the latter, using – emphasized with gilding – parallel rows of stamped circles, triple crescents, and triangles made from dashes lying one above the other (cf. Nowakiewicz, Rzeszotarska-Nowakiewicz 2012; Nowakiewicz ed. 2016a).

The scabbard neck (no. 11) and quillon fittings (no. 12) made from a malleable, 22 carat alloy are unique. The skeleton of both claddings was made from a thick, malleable, and appropriately formed sheet metal. Profiled and beaded wire was soldered to the edge of the grip, serving both as decoration and a strengthening of the fitting’s construction. Particularly noteworthy is the perfectly crafted bead-wire, where every second bead is incised in a decorative manner. Facings of the fittings are decorated with gold ornament with floral and faunal motifs, punched from matrixes. The space between them is filled with fine, stamped ornament. The punching and decorative patterns repeated on both objects point to their having being made at the same workshop. The impressed profile of the neck fitting on the quillon fitting confirms that these are elements of the same weapon. The quillon fitting was decorated with a thick, gold sheet with deep, punched geometric patterns. The bordering was made by stamping with punches (upper and lower triangles). On this an applique was placed, with presentations of birds and dolphins antithetically positioned, and the fitting of the grip embellished with facings with walking lions shown in profile. At the two

ends there are appliques with the repeated motif of a lotus, enclosed with depictions of birds – identical to that on the quillon fitting. The zoomorphic patterns punched in a matrix have a full cross-section, with flattened backs. The ornament is perfectly made and highly detailed. Floral and zoomorphic elements were pressed onto a matrix and then cut out, then soldered with pure gold to the plate ornamented with a stamped pattern (Nowakiewicz, Rzeszotarska-Nowakiewicz 2012; Nowakiewicz ed. 2016a; Nowakiewicz, Rzeszotarska-Nowakiewicz, work in progress).

The silver bird figurine (no. 14) had also been cast into a fire and subject to a degree of melting. Deformed weeps of metal are particularly visible in the extremities and on narrower elements, naturally the first to melt when subject to higher temperatures. The gilding of the surface also was destroyed, as it had fused with the silver backing and lost its colour. The high level of traces of mercury points to its application by fire gilding. The item is thick walled, hollow, made with lost-wax technique, with its core inside the model. Details of feathers, flight feathers, and rectrices were made by line engraving and punched with small stamps. The bird's eyes were particularly finely worked. The oval eye socket is filled with a black mass (*niello*) into which small balls were embedded to mark the pupils. These probably were from some copper alloy, at present covered by a thick green-grey patine. In the item's bottom there is a rectangular hole evidencing both where – and how firmly – it was mounted. Further signs – uneven surface of leg endings – suggests that the figurine was once attached with claws to some larger surface and later broken off (Nowakiewicz, Rzeszotarska-Nowakiewicz 2012; Nowakiewicz ed. 2016a).

Niello

Niello is the use of black coloured sulphides of metals such as silver, copper, and/or lead used to decorate metal objects as incrustation or filling. It is made by heating filings of a metal – or metals – mixed with sulphur and flux in a crucible to the point where the metal and sulphur react. The melted sulphides settle at the bottom of the crucible and can later be finely ground and placed (with flux) on the surface of the object in pre-prepared nests or grooves. One must remember, however, that silver sulphide bereft of a lead admixture breaks down into metallic silver at 861°C, thus spoiling the desired effect. To avoid that phenomena ancient goldsmiths took care not to exceed c. 600°C temperature, at which point the powdered substance only softened and could be applied in layers and densely compacted in the nests. An alternative solution was to add appropriate quantities of copper and lead to the silver sulphide so as to lower its melting point, thus producing a liquid *niello* for coating the item directly. This method was used to decorate larger surfaces, analogously to enamelling or painting³.

3 The technological aspects of *niello* (including problems with chemical identification of components and manners of application of the paste), and the use of this technique in the so-called polychrome, three-colour ornamental style in Late Antiquity, its dating and experimental reconstruction, are covered in more detail by: S. La Niece (1983), W.A. Oddy, M. Bimson and S. La Niece (1983), F. Schweizer

Until recently the prevalent view was that lead began to be used in the making of *niello* not until the early Middle Ages. However, the latest research has shown similar mixes of components to have been known in Late Antiquity (Giumlía-Mair, La Niece 1998, 142; Mozgai et al. 2018; there further literature). Also, such knowledge of *niello* decorating techniques and patination of silver is found in written sources. Pliny the Elder provides quite detailed information on this subject (*Historia Naturalis* XXXIII, 46, 131)⁴, while a more laconic description is found in a slightly younger (dated to middle or late 3rd century AD) *Leyden* papyrus, a work describing contemporary metallurgic practices (discovered in Thebes in the 19th century; Stawicki 1987)⁵. Other sources, ones dating to the early Middle Ages, that describe the recipe for *niello*⁶ are known, but not quite pertinent for the Roman Period technology here discussed.

In the finds from Nidajno *niello* was employed in two manners: either as a solid mass, cut into small pieces (i.e., triangles) and placed analogously to incrustation in punched nests, or as a semi-liquid mass used to coat larger background surfaces⁷.

(1993), A. Giumlía-Mair and S. La Niece (1998, 140–142), A. Giumlía-Mair (2002; 2012), A. Pacini (2004), A. Bosselmann (2005), B. Niemeyer (2018a; 2018b, 289–291) and V. Mozgai et al. (2018).

- 4 “The people of Egypt stain their silver vessels, that they may see represented in them their god Anubis; and it is the custom with them to paint, and not to chase, their silver. This usage has now passed to our own triumphal statues even; and, a truly marvellous fact, the value of silver has been enhanced by deadening its brilliancy. The following is the method adopted: with the silver are mixed two-thirds of the very finest Cyprian copper, that known as ‘coronarium’, and a proportion of live sulphur equal to that of the silver. The whole of these are then melted in an earthen vessel well luted with potter’s clay, the operation being completed when the cover becomes detached from the vessel. Silver admits also of being blackened with the yolk of a hard-boiled egg; a tint, however, which is removed by the application of vinegar and chalk” (*Historia Naturalis* XXXIII, 46, 131; from the English translation of: *The Natural History. Pliny the Elder*, J. Bostock, H.T. Riley. London 1855).
- 5 “Asem 2 parts; lead 4 parts. Place in empty terracota vessel. Put one third of the sulphur on the fire and place in furnace to melt. After removing from furnace roll [flat] [the obtained product] and use for whatever you need. If you wish to make an item with ornament, from wrought or cast metal, saw and cut off: it will not rust.” Asem is the Egyptian name for *electrum* (Greek – electrum), i.e., alloyed gold and silver. The term was later used for e.g., an amalgamate of silver and mercury, alloyed tin and silver, or pure tin (Stawicki 1987).
- 6 Among others in *Mappae Clavicula* from 9-10th century, Book III *De coloribus et de artibus romanorum* by Eraclius from 11-12th century, Book III *Diversarum artium schedula* by Theophilus Presbyter from the 1st half of the 12th century (cf. Raub 1993).
- 7 It must be pointed out that *niello* composition cannot be identified without laboratory analysis as, regardless of composition, the end product is always the same – black and brittle (Giumlía-Mair 2012, 108). The results of laboratory analysis of *niello* from Nidajno fittings are the subject of a separate publication (Rzeszotarska-Nowakiewicz, Nowakiewicz, Miśta-Jakubowska, Gójska, Kalbarczyk, work in progress).

Research to date shows that the discoveries from Nidajno were made using a broad range of jewelry crafting techniques known to the Ancient world – namely, casting and forging precious metals, stamping, chemical soldering – and this including quite advanced forms such as diffusion bonding and fire gilding, as well as ornamentation with *niello* of varying composition. This is evidence of the high skill and expertise of the artisans who crafted them, ones who probably worked at a stationary workshop (cf. Nowakiewicz ed. 2016a; Nowakiewicz, Rzeszotarska-Nowakiewicz, work in progress).

4. Stylistic analysis

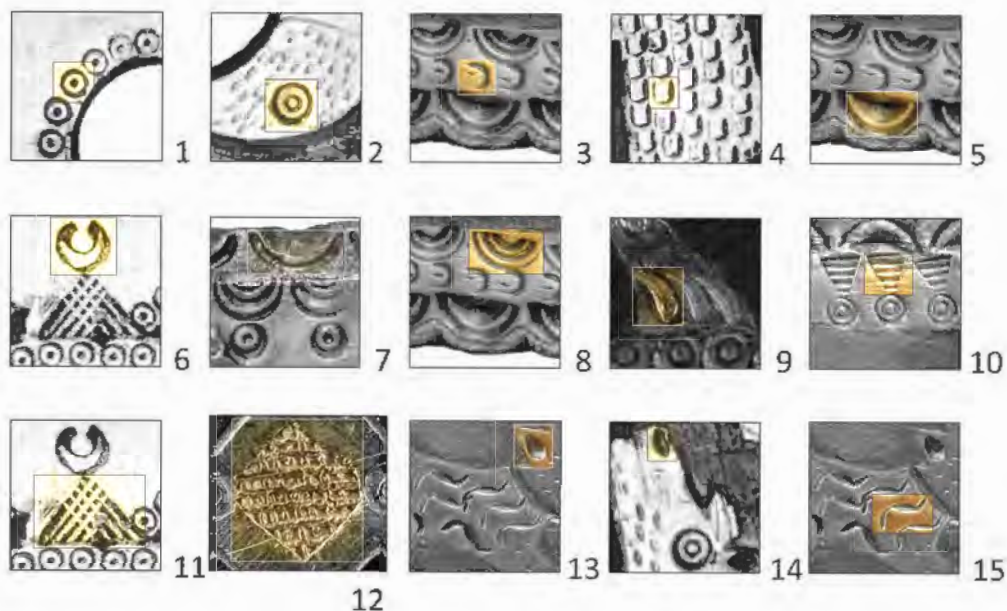
4.1. Technological and workshop elements of styling

4.1.1. Stamps

Stamps are the most widespread type of decoration recorded on this group of fittings (nos. 1–10) from Nidajno, and are used on all catalogued items. Most stamp marks were used to form geometric patterns, as well as to emphasize certain zoomorphic depictions (especially eyes, ears, nostrils, snouts, and fur). As a technological more than a decorative feature, stamping was additionally employed in order to form triangular nests (nos. 1, 2, 10) that were later filled with *niello*.

It is possible to identify 15 types of stamps used to decorate Nidajno fittings (Ill. 6):

1. circle with dot;
2. double circle (eyes);
3. open circle with dot;
4. scale;
5. full crescent;
6. empty crescent (contour);
7. single half-circle;
8. double half-circle;
9. triple half-circle;
10. triangle made from rectangular beams or dashes one above the other;
11. triangle filled with cross-crossing lines;
12. square filled with grid;
13. large double convex stamp (ears);
14. small oval stamp (teeth, nostrils);
15. s-shaped stamp (wave; used to emphasis texture of fur).



Ill. 6. Types of stamps used to decorate fittings (nos. 1–9) from Nidajno
(edit. A. Rzeszotarska-Nowakiewicz)

This broad set of punches was employed in a thought out and consequent manner, in effect causing all the discussed finds to share several common features (Ill. 7).

Edges/rims of fittings (Ill. 8). In almost all cases (with the sole exception of “fitting with beasts” [no. 7]) these are marked with crescent shaped indentations, with tips touching, and further highlighted through use of *niello* (“postal stamp style”). All noted examples were made with the same punch.

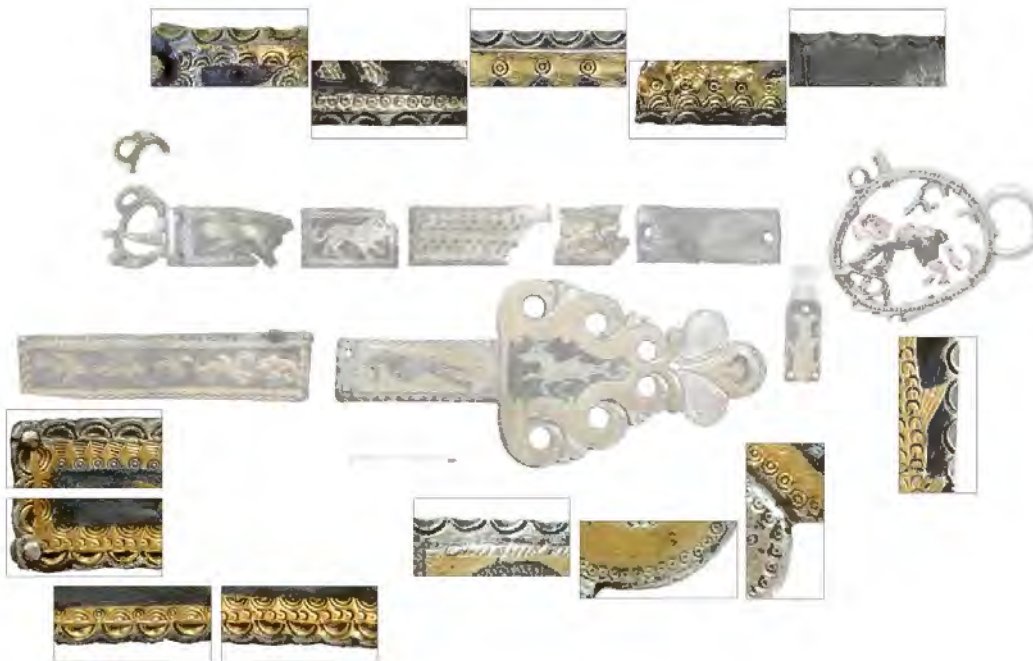
Borderings (Ill. 8). Along the edges there are broad margins filled with various stamp compositions (exceptions being fitting nos. 8 and 9, i.e., “palmetto” and “fitting with fish”). In spite of being made with the use of a broad selection of patterns (i.e., punches), the lavish ornamentation on the edges of the items always follows a zonal layout. A salient fact is that in all cases the stamps on the bordering were made onto a gilded surface.

Details of zoomorphic presentations (Ill. 9). Elements of animal anatomy are always depicted in the same manner. In all cases an eye is made with two circles (smaller inside larger), nostrils and ears are made with a double convex shaped stamp, scales (fish and hippocampus) and body surfaces (on large fitting no. 7) are made with an open-circle stamp, with parts of coating (fur and feathers) additionally accentuated with engraving and shallow etching.

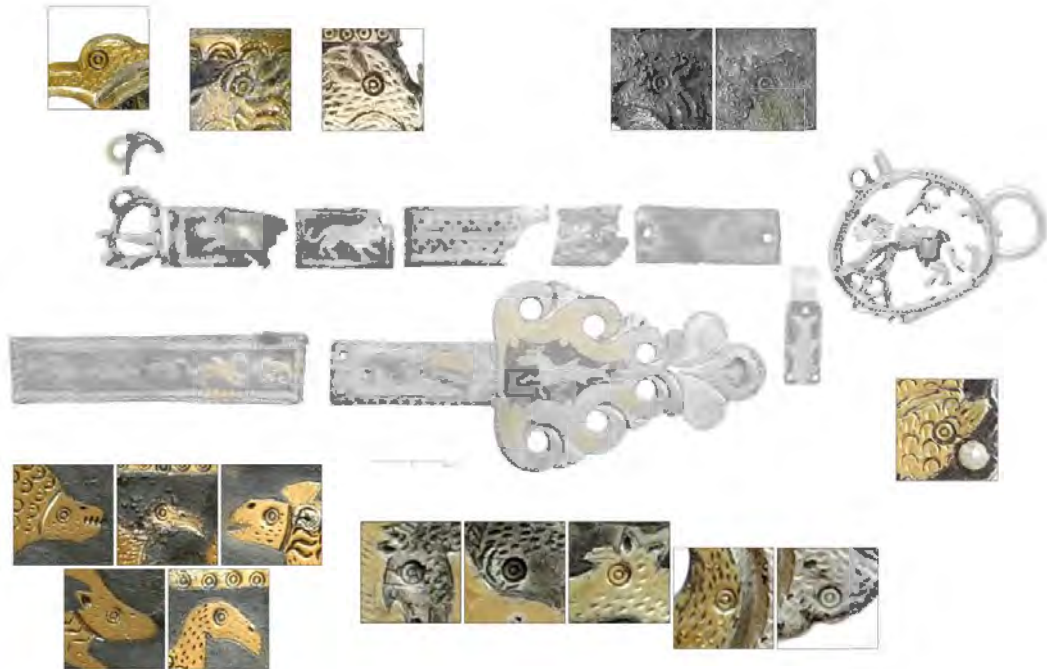
The motif of a triangle crown with a crescent (with upturned “horns”; Ill. 7). An equilateral triangle is formed by criss-crossing dashes with touching ends. A composition with this thrice-repeated motif was placed between the main decorative elements of the palmetto fitting (no. 8).



Ill. 7. Distinct features of finds from Nidajno: stamps (Photo M. Osiadacz, M. Bogacki; edit. T. Nowakiewicz)



Ill. 8. Distinct features of finds from Nidajno: edges and borderings (Photo M. Osiadacz, M. Bogacki; edit. T. Nowakiewicz)



Ill. 9. Distinct features of finds from Nidajno: animal eyes and nostrils (Photo. M. Osiadacz, M. Bogacki; edit. T. Nowakiewicz)

4.1.2. The contrasting of different coloured surfaces – polychromic effect

Another distinct feature of ornamentation on Nidajno fittings is the contrasting of silver, gold, and black. Such polychromy reinforces the message of opulence. Silver is the natural colour of the material used for the main element of the fittings. One may note that silver was intentionally left bare in the palmetto fitting (no. 8; on two pairs of bird heads, and the two external leaves of palmetto crown) and on the external bordering. Gold colour comes from the gilding of elements of zoomorphic depictions, and was additionally highlighted by its placement on top of *niello* blackened backdrops. The very same intention led to the reversed procedure (silver coating with gilded background) applied to the fragmentarily preserved fitting with tail (no. 5) and the depiction of the human-equine hybrid on the palmetto fitting (no. 8).

4.2. Stylistic analogies

4.2.1. Belt fittings from the *Barbaricum*

Decorating metal elements of dress with punched details was practised in the European *Barbaricum* throughout the entire Roman Period. However, combining these to create elaborate designs began only during phases C_{1b}–C₂ in Scandinavia and areas occupied by the Przeworsk and Wielbark Cultures (Andersson 1993; 1995; Lau 2012, 54–55; Bitner-Wróblewska 2001; 2017; Bitner-Wróblewska, Pesch, Przybyła 2020, 236–238; see further literature there). In Scandinavia decorating in this manner was used on items perceived as status symbols of exceptional stature, i.e., almost exclusively gold rings, bracelets, and necklaces. Other elements of prestigious fashion accessories such as fibulae, pins, pendants, belts, and horse tack fittings were mostly decorated with embossed gilded and silver sheet, glass inlay, and incisions. At the close of phase C₂ and during phase C₃ on some items of the latter type we witness the increasing use of stamps replacing embossed sheet decorations. At that time the repertoire of motifs was expanded – mostly with repeated circles and half-circles, and various types of triangles and stars composed from several smaller elements. During phase C₂ in Scandinavia punched decorations began to be combined with mechanical gilding, and slightly later (during phase C₃) with *niello* inlay (Bitner-Wróblewska, Pesch, Przybyła 2020, 233, 237–238, ill. 6.1B).

Kent Andersson identified quite a large number of motifs – sixty-eight, to be precise – among the stamps used to decorate golden Scandinavian jewellery in the late Roman Period, and assigned them to four groups: circles (nos. 1–13), half circles (nos. 14–27), triangular motifs (nos. 28–49, 67, 68) and other (nos. 50–66; Andersson 1995, 183, ill. 201). Among gold artefacts the most often noted ornament is that made with only one type of stamp, with combinations of two, three, or even four types of punches on a single item being less common. Andersson established that, although most of the motifs evolved from older local traditions, the wide-spread use of stamped decorations in Scandinavia begins to increase markedly during C_{1b} and then blooms in phases C₂ and C₃. In this period one may note the high correlation between punched decorations on Scandinavian and provincial Roman wares (Andersson 1995, 182–189, ill. 200–204)¹. In a more modest form, composite stamped ornaments also appear in the last third of the 4th and in the early 5th century on Roman military belts, Velp Type necklaces, and other elements of dress in areas extending along the Rhine and Danubian *limes* (Quast 2017; see further literature there).

¹ A good example may be gold serpent bracelets as well as bracelets and necklaces dated to phases C_{1b}–C₂, e.g., Type ÄEG 373 bracelet from Skottgård, Timrå par., Sweden (three types of punches; Andersson 1995, 100, ill. 71), Type ÄEG 374 bracelets from Dalbo, Halla par., Sweden (four types of punches; Andersson 1993, 212, ill. 89) and Agerholm By, Vester-Vandet par., Denmark (six types of punches; Andersson 1995, 101, ill. 72), or Type ÄEG 375 bracelets from Burs, Källunge par., Sweden (three types of stamps; Andersson 1993, 215; 1995, 102).

Comparing the repertoire of stamps from Scandinavia assembled by Andersson with those on fittings from Nidajno points to the latter being decorated with punches at that time unknown among Scandinavian wares (crescent and edge “postal stamp pattern”). However, such stamp types are present on belt fittings from burial III at Wrocław-Zakrzów, Wrocław District “postal stamp pattern” and crescent) and elements of belts from Pielgrzymowo, Nidzica District (“postal stamp pattern”).

Two rectangular, silver fittings from Wrocław-Zakrzów, from burial III, dated to the end of the 3rd century – *terminus post quem* set by an *aureus* of Claudius II Gothicus (268–270; Grempler 1888, 11, 13, Pl. VII: 6a, 6b; Quast 2009a, 11, ill. 19, 20; 2014, 323) are decorated in a manner analogous to the finds from Nidajno. Both were once gilded, probably with quite thick gold sheet used as a backdrop for figurative presentations. The larger fitting, decorated with depictions of animals (Ill. 10: a–d), was shaped like as a 4 cm wide strip or band and folded along the upper, broader edge – thus forming a long, cylindrical eyelet (probably clasping a link attaching the band to another element of the belt). The remains of a leather belt, attached with three silver rivets, are visible between the inner and outer facings of the fitting. The visible outer facing is decorated with a stamped zoomorphic ornament presenting an eagle with large beak and talons and a quadruped with massive antlers (a deer?), the shape of which has been partly worn away. The eyes and ears were made with a dotted circle punch. The fur and plumage were depicted using fine etching. The ornamented surface was covered with gold foil, then tapped into the punched patterns, carefully avoiding the animal presentations, thus setting them off against the gold background. The second fitting is a rectangular band with four rivets in the corners, decorated with a design of eleven stylized bird heads turned towards one another and separated with a silver band emphasized with a row of double circles in relief. That very same stamp was used to mark the birds’ eyes. When describing these items Wilhelm Grempler, who had personally handled them, expressed the opinion that even though they are but fragmentarily preserved, these items entail “a treasure trove for the specialized scholar, for whom the description and illustration may only serve as incentive to study the items in situ. Such items may be recreated only in small part with words and images” (Grempler 1888, 13, Pl. VI: 8, 9).

As to the finds from Pielgrzymowo, a lavish punched ornament was placed on silver artefacts: two buckles (group D, type 10 acc. Madyda-Legutko [1986]) and a rectangular belt tip from belt no. I from the lavish burial at barrow HG1, dated to the 2nd half or the end of the 3rd century (Lau 2012, 46–55, 66–68, 149–150, ill. 18, 22, Pl. 13: 4–5, 8; 15: 1; 2014b). The frame of the larger buckle (HG1/10) is decorated with two parallel rows of stamped eyes along its entire length. On the ferrule the edges of the rectangular undecorated field are marked with impressions made with three types of stamps: circles, circles with marked centres, and concave-sided rectangles. The external, shorter edge of the ferrule is emphasized with a deep “postal stamp pattern”. Only two stamps were used to decorate the smaller buckle (HG1/11), i.e., smaller and larger circles (used in an identical manner as that employed to make eyes of animals on fittings from

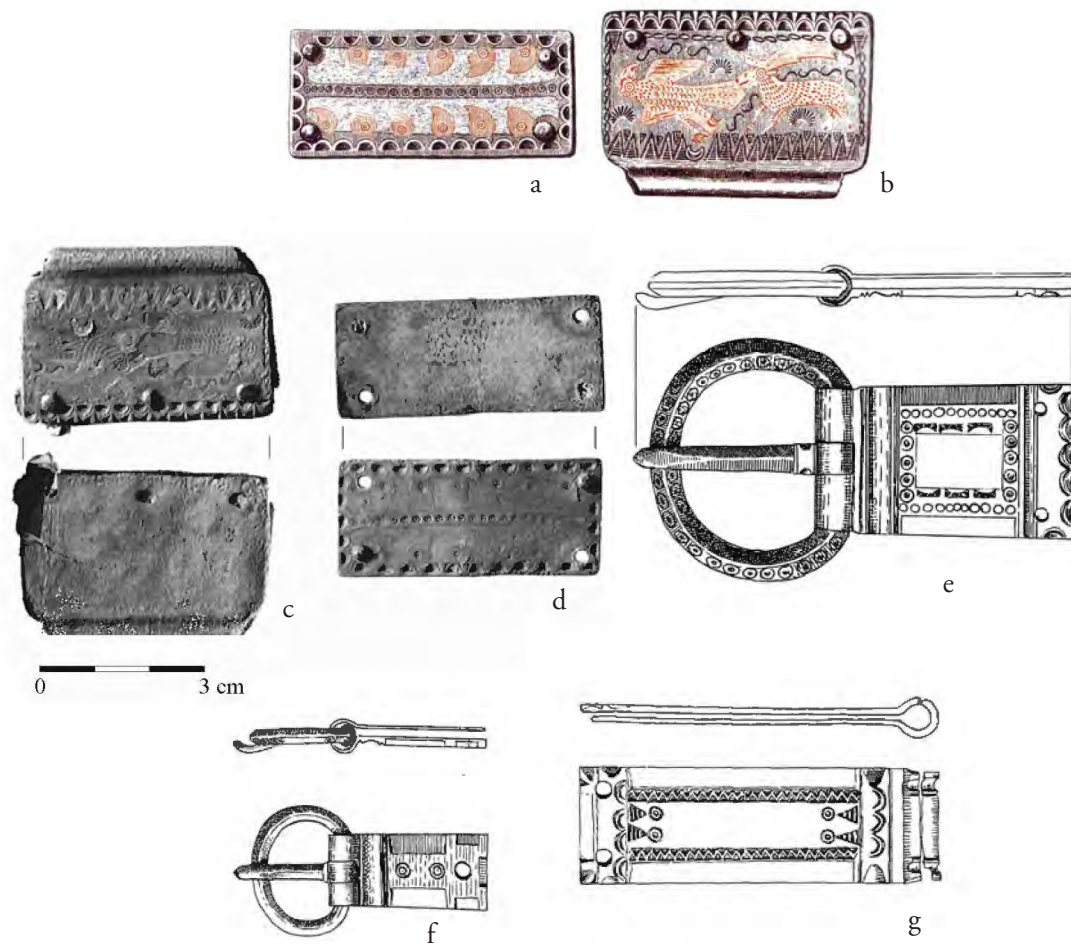
Nidajno). The rectangular fitting (HG1/15) is decorated with a design consisting of two rows of “wolf fangs” (along the longer sides) and bands of double semi-circular stamps (along the shorter sides), combined with a sequence of two triangles (formed from horizontally arranged dashes) topped with double circles. Identically as in the case of the larger buckle, the rows of stamps form a rectangular frame, enclosed by an undecorated field in the central section of the artefact. On all three fittings the stamped patterns are harmoniously combined with the faceting of the outer edges, while the items’ dimensions, proportions, and stylistic integrity point to their being part of a single belt (Ill. 10: e–g; see Lau 2012, 46–47; 2014b). Among the punches used, six are also known from Nidajno: the double crescents, double circles (one inside another), circle with dot, triangles formed by horizontally arranged dashes and topped with double circles and single circles (types A, C, F, G and I acc. Lau [2012, 52, ill. 22]) and the “postal stamp pattern” on the larger buckle, by Nina Lau termed “semi-spherical faceting” (see Lau 2012, 50, ill. 18). In contrast with the Nidajno fittings those from Pielgrzymowo do not bear figural presentations, whether zoo- or anthropomorphic.

It should be remembered that the presence of stamped ornaments on metal elements of a belt is not a precise dating indicator. Similar designs were in widespread use in the later stages of Roman influence, becoming ubiquitous at the turn of the 4th and 5th centuries (thus setting a usage horizon of more than a few decades; see Quast 2017, 291). The apogee of the use of such ornamentation came at the onset of the Migration Period, with stamped patterns becoming the defining decoration manner of of the Sösdala-Untersiebenbrunn style (Bitner-Wróblewska 2001; 2017; Bitner-Wróblewska, Pesch, Przybyła 2020; see further literature there).

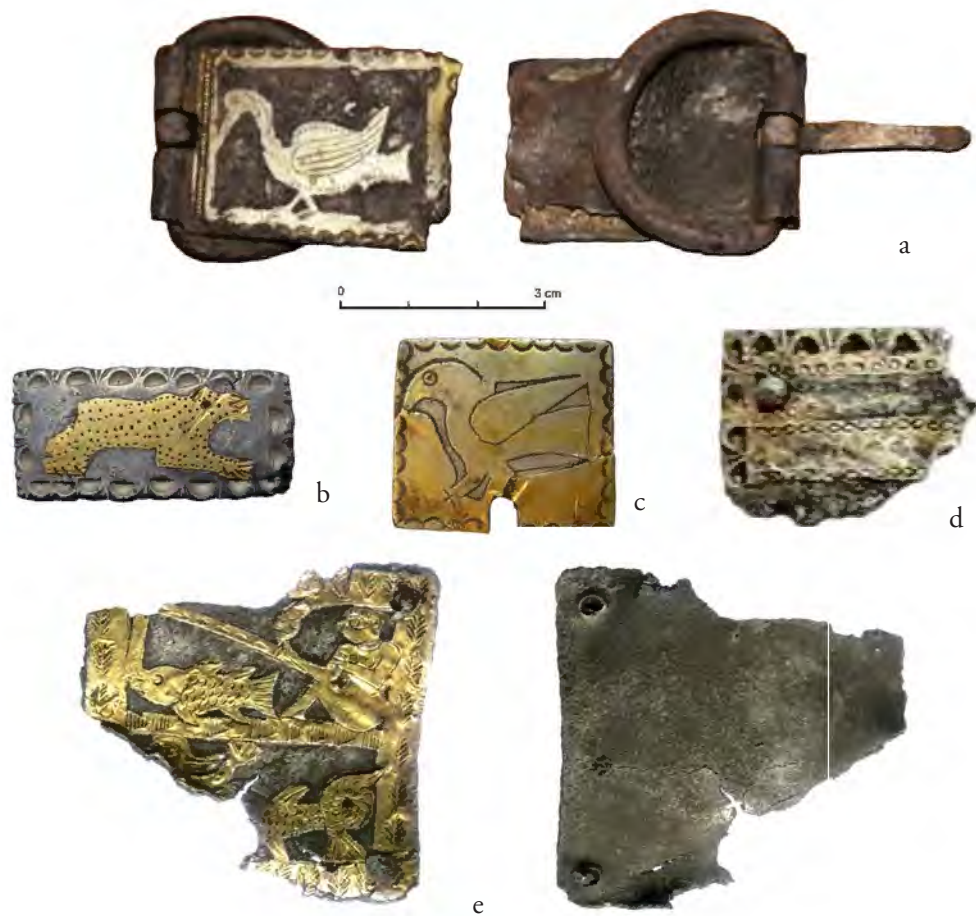
Further analogous finds to those from Nidajno come from Ukraine (Ill. 11). However, due to the illegal circumstances of their discovery we do not possess any data on the accompanying archaeological context, nor are these items available for examination and analysis². All possess features like the fittings from Nidajno: the bodies, cast in silver (?), have their edges decorated with ornament made from semi-spherical stamps and bear zoomorphic and geometric presentations emphasized with gilding. The buckle Ukraine, no. 1 is decorated with a gilded image of a bird placed on a blackened (probably *niello*) background, and its bordiure made of semi-spherical punches is emphasized with a gilded band (Ill. 11: a). The other fitting (Ukraine, no. 2) was not as finely made: on a rectangular background, surrounded with bordiure from semi-spherical stamps arranged with its arched portion facing outwards, there is a stylized and gilded depiction of a predator (Ill. 11: b). The styling of the third fitting, roughly squarish (Ukraine, no. 3), is similar to the aforementioned examples: the edge is decorated with a highly simplified “postal stamp pattern” bordiure, inside which there is an even more simplified depiction of a bird (this

² The photographs of artefacts presented in Ill. 11 were found on web pages of Ukrainian detectorists. Here I wish to express special gratitude to Maxim Levada who, being a professional archaeologist, identifies artefacts discovered through such activities and strives to counteract the negative effects of illegal exploration.

fitting is either a half-product or an imitation of high quality products of this type; Ill. 11: c). Yet another analogy from Ukraine (no. 4) is a fitting without a zoomorphic motif, but decorated with lengthwise bands of gilding and blackening (*niello?*). The feature which allows its grouping with the analyzed artefacts is the stamped bordiure along the edges, similar to that of the larger fitting from Wrocław-Zakrzów (i.e., the simplified *kimation* pattern). These artefacts also share the same braiding pattern: on the Zakrzów fitting it was placed below the stamped edge (Ill. 10: a, c), while on the example from Ukraine – along the edge of the gilded band (Ill. 11: d).



Ill. 10. Style analogies: a–d – fittings from lavish burials from Wrocław-Zakrzów, Wrocław District, burial I (Quast 2009a, ill. 73: 5–6); e–g – fittings from Pielgrzymowo, Nidzica District, barrow HG1 (Lau 2012, ill. 18)



Ill. 11. Stylistic analogies from Ukraine: a – buckle no. 1; b – fitting no. 2; c – fitting no. 3; d – fitting no. 4 (Артефакти України [Artifacts of Ukraine], <https://www.facebook.com/groups/1813007115390957>, accessed on: 9.12.2021); e – fitting no. 5 (<https://violity.com/ua/forum/topic/45480-nakladka-chk>, accessed on: 13.11.2024)

Another appliqué, made in a technique and style analogous to the Nidajno fittings, appeared on the Ukrainian site in 2024. It is a fragmentary piece of silver, gilded, stamped and engraved, probably decorated with a *niello* fitting, with an elaborate scene alluding to Roman representations of fishing (Ill. 11: e).

Comparing the discussed fittings brings attention to interesting shared features of this group of geographically rather distant finds (Ill. 12). Of particular note are the analogous frames of the buckles from Pielgrzymowo and Ukraine (Ukraine, no. 1) and the presence of the simplified *kimation* on the edges of the fitting from Wrocław-Zakrzów and two Ukrainian finds (Ukraine, no. 2;

Ukraine, no. 4). In this context the fittings from Pielgrzymowo stand out by their additional faceting – a diagnostic element of fittings in the faceted style, popular for parade equipment recorded in lavish Sarmatian burials dated to the middle of and 2nd half of the 3rd century (Khrapunov 2011).

The zoomorphic motif on the find from Wrocław-Zakrzów (a bird of prey and a deer) and other



Ill. 12. Fitting with analogous stylistic features: a–d – Wrocław-Zakrzów, Wrocław District, burial I; e–g – Pielgrzymowo, Nidzica District, barrow HG1; h – Ukraine, no. 1; i – Ukraine, no. 2; j – Ukraine, no. 3; k – Ukraine, no. 4 (edit. A. Rzeszotarska-Nowakiewicz)

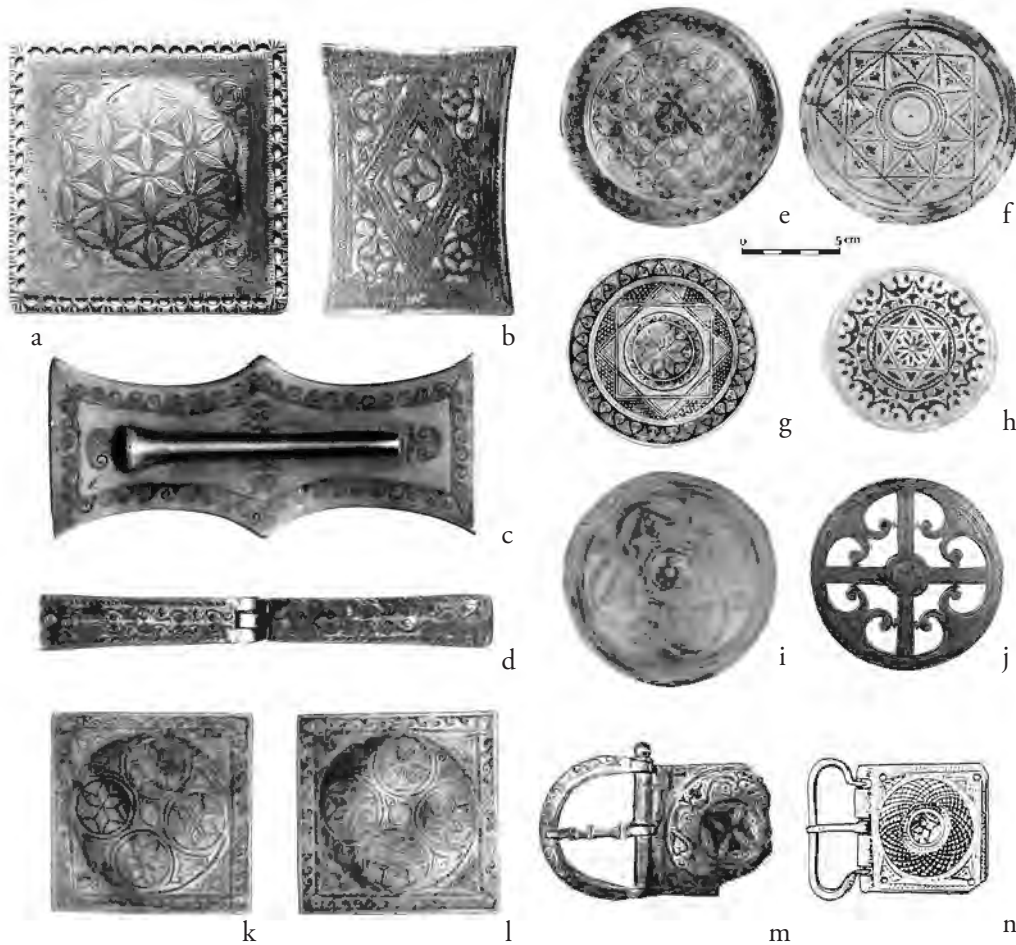
decorative details suggest a link between such 3rd century fittings and the Sarmatian milieu of the Black Sea steppes. This is interpreted as evidence of contact between the Central and Northern European *Barbaricum* and the North Pontic area (see Przybyła 2018, 574–578; see further literature there), yet this issue has not been analyzed in a manner allowing for deeper going conclusions. Nevertheless, one should keep in mind that the chronology of such contacts is not irrelevant for the dating of materials from Nidajno (Chapter 8).

4.2.2. Fittings of Roman military belts (*cingula*)

The technology and certain ornamental motifs of the fittings from Nidajno have parallels among silver scabbard fittings (box shaped chape) and richly decorated Roman military belts (*cingula*)³ ornamented with *niello* and gilding.

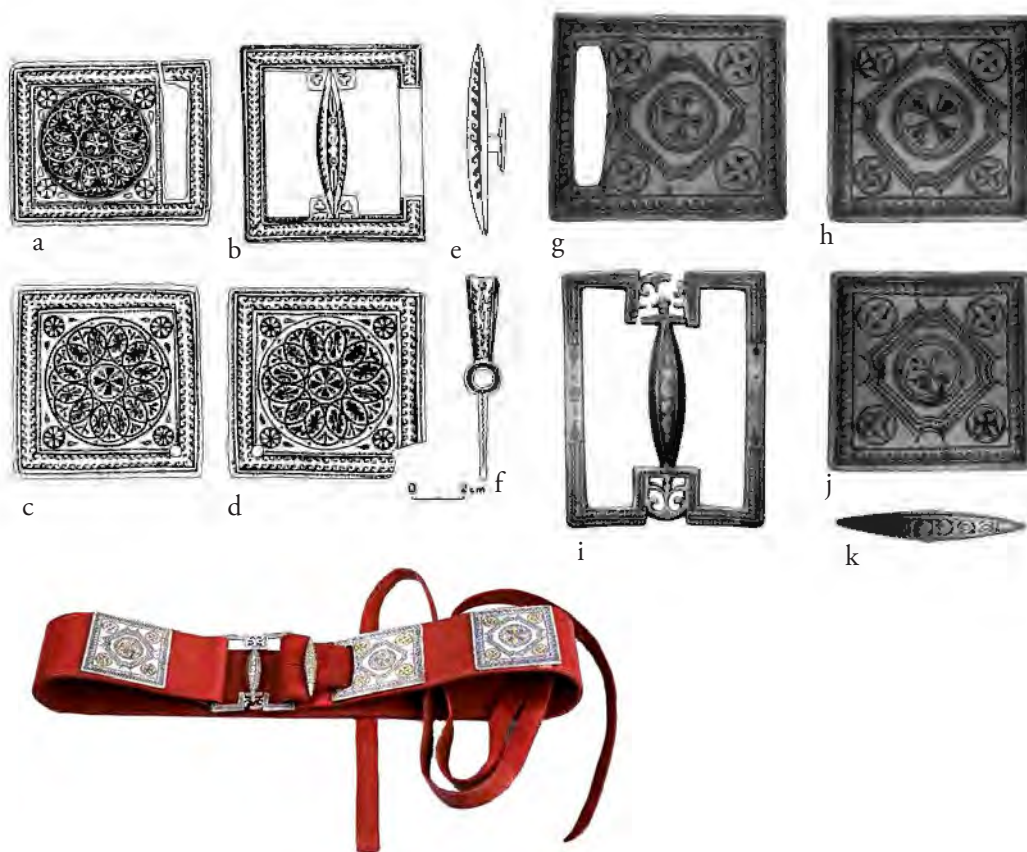
³ In contrast to the *balteus* (belts worn obliquely across the chest), *cingula* were worn around the waist (see note 33).

In the 3rd century officers' belts and swords with precious metal decorations made part of the panoply of the military elite shaping that era. Such items are known principally from burial context, although they are also recorded in settlement and hoard inventories – mostly from, although not limited to, the militarized Danubian provinces. They are encountered along the entire continental *limes*, and are particularly visible in sites connected with the functioning of Roman military camps, be these permanent (*Aquincum*, *Brigetio*, *Apulum*, *Durostorum*) or temporary (*Aquileia*; Ill. 13–17).

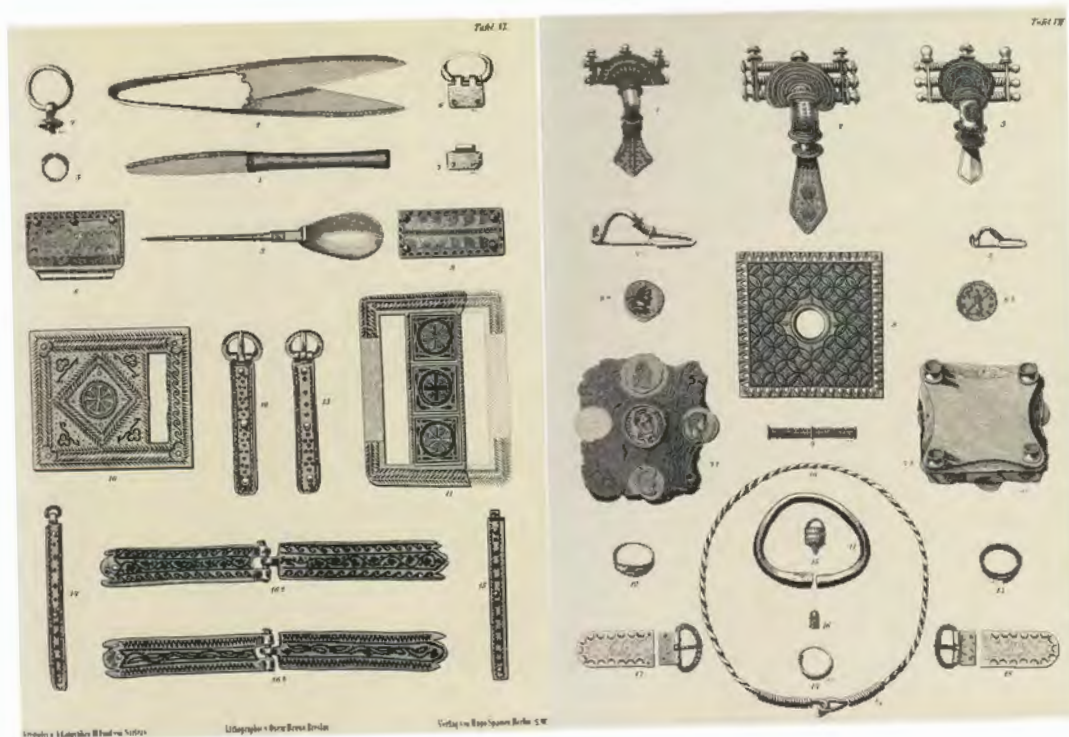


Ill. 13. *Cingula* and chapes decorated with *niello*: a–d – Nagyberki, Szalacsapuszta, Hungary (Mráv 2011, ill. 7); e–f – Severinstor, Cologne, Germany (Martin-Kilcher 1985, ill. 6); g – *Augusta Vindelicum* / Augsburg, Germany (Martin-Kilcher 1985, ill. 16); h – *Augusta Raurica* / Augst, Switzerland (Martin-Kilcher 1985, ill. 3–4); i–j – *Durostorum* / Silistra, Bulgaria (Геров 1985); k–l – Schloßmuseum, Berlin, Germany (Grünhagen 1954, pl. 8/A); m – *Aquileia* I, Italy (Buora 1996, ill. 5); n – Skupi, Skopje, Macedonia (Martin-Kilcher 1993, 306, ill. 2: 7; Fischer 1988, ill. 7.1; Mráv 2011)

Highly representative for this find category is the complete set of silver belt fittings dated to the final quarter of the 3rd century, decorated with gilding and *niello* from the town of *Aquincum* (site - Budapest-Pasarét, *Aquincum* "A", Hungary, discovery from 1863; Ill. 14: g–k). Other similar discoveries from Hungary and Romania – the fragment of a tin-coated fitting made from copper alloy discovered in the southern part of Transdanubia (Pannonia Inferior; Ill. 17: a–b) and a belt tip from *Brigetio* (Komárom-Ószőny, Hungary; Pannonia Inferior), as well as boat-like fitting from *Apulum* (Alba Iulia, Romania; Dacia Superior; Horedt 1958, 22–23, ill. 3.1; Diaconescu 1999, 220–222, 240, ill. 12.40) prove that *niello* was used as decoration not only on silver, but also bronze items – although admittedly the latter were much less numerous. The tip of a military belt from *Brigetio* is dated to the 2nd half of the 3rd century, similarly as the analogous set of silver belt fittings from the burial of an officer from *Durostorum* (Silistra, Bulgaria; Ill. 14: a–f).



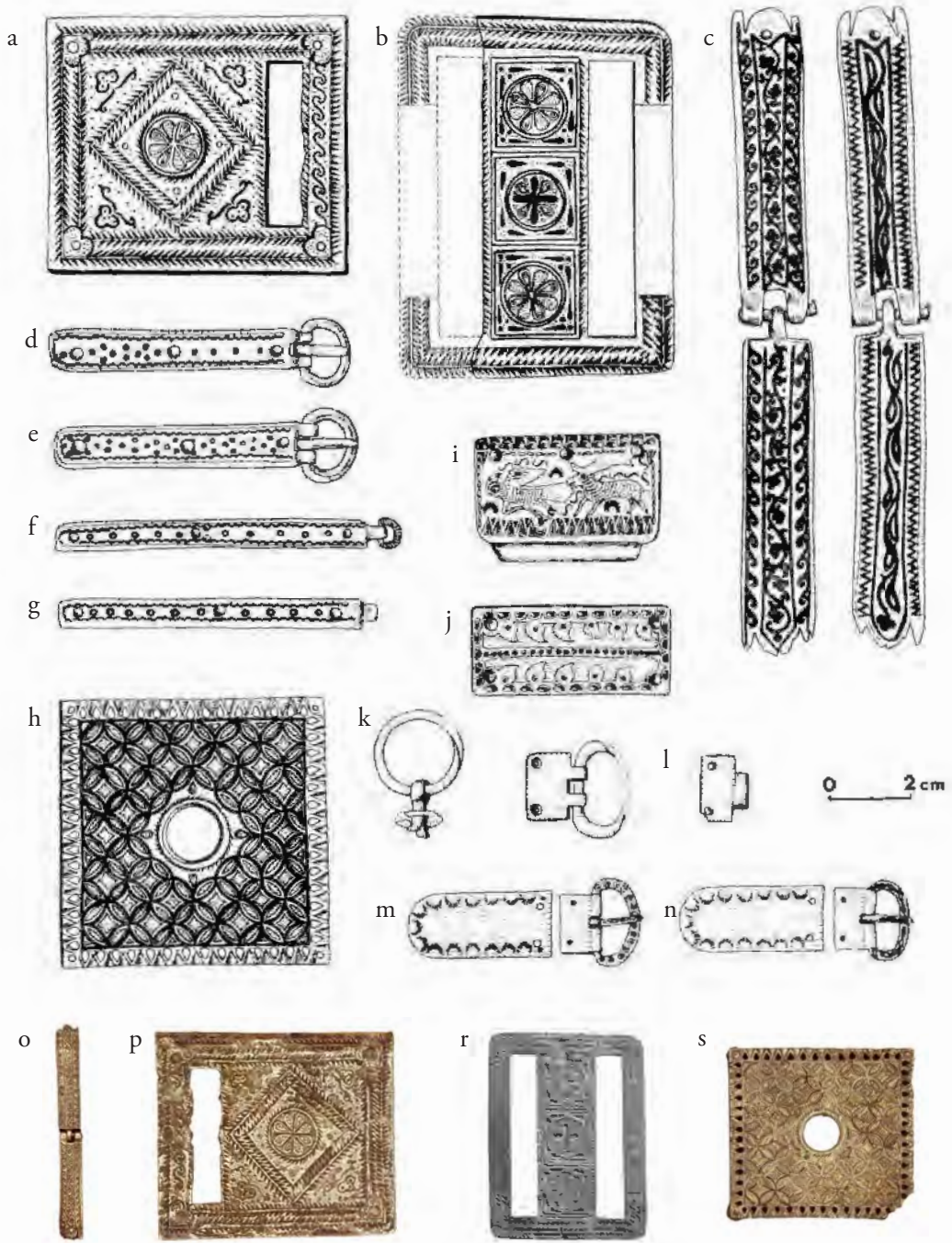
Ill. 14. Silver fittings of *cingula* decorated with *niello*: a–f – *Durostorum* / Silistra, Bulgaria (Madyda-Legutko 1992, Pl. VI); g–k – belt from *Aquincum* / Budapest-Pasarét, Hungary, and its reconstruction (Mráv 2011, ill. 11: 1–5)



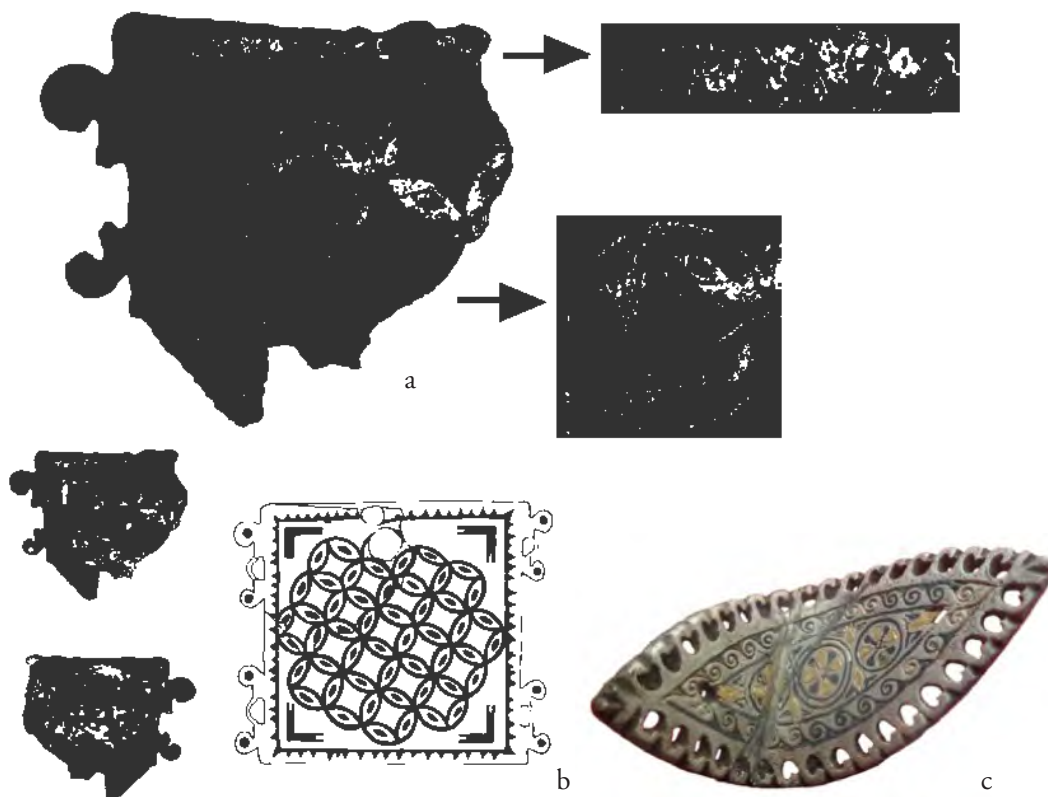
Ill. 15. Wrocław-Zakrzów, Wrocław District, equipment of burial III in original publication (Grempler 1888, Pl. VI–VII)

Some metal elements of these belts found their way into the equipment of the lavish “princely” burial no. III at Wrocław-Zakrzów, included in the same assemblage as two fittings similar to the one discovered in Nidajno, indicating their chronological and functional affinity (Ill. 15, 16). The edge of the square fitting with a spherical opening from Zakrzów is decorated with a punched, openwork bordiure. A similar manner of decoration was applied to the edge of the fitting from Nagyberki, Szalacsapuszta (Hungary; Ill. 13: a–d), whose ornament – importantly – is similar to the *kimation* on fittings from Wrocław-Zakrzów and Ukraine (Ukraine, no. 4; Ill. 11: d).

The fragment of a fitting discovered in the southern part of Transdanubia was cast in copper alloy and coated with silver-imitating tin provides an insight into incrustation with *niello*. Larger surfaces were blackened by application of a semi-liquid paste, while smaller elements (e.g., triangles on the edges) were cut out from solidified *niello* and placed in previously prepared nests (Ill. 17: a–b). This manner of applying the ornament was used on fittings from Nidajno – on the frames of buckles [nos. 1, 2] and on the openwork strap divider [no. 10].



Ill. 16. Belt fittings from Wrocław-Zakrzów, Wrocław District, burial I (Madyda-Legutko 1992, Pl. IV [a–n]; Quast 2009a [o–s])



Ill. 17. a–b – fragment of *cingulum* fitting from southern Transdanubia, Hungary, and its reconstruction (Mráv 2011, ill. 1); c – Ukraine, loose find (Артефакти України [Artifacts of Ukraine], <https://www.facebook.com/groups/1813007115390957>, accessed: 9.12.2021)

4.2.3. Roman scabbard fittings with niello

Roman iconographic sources and identification of archaeological context for part of the finds make it clear that the assignment of sword scabbard box chapes to the personal equipment of 3rd century Roman soldiers is beyond doubt. Parade versions of these chapes (from silver, often decorated with *niello* and gilding) were probably worn by senior officers, this being well attested by finds from burials of Roman officers at Cologne in Germany and Silistra in Bulgaria (Dumanov 2005). Although most such artefacts come from Roman military facilities and areas of military operations (e.g., Augst in Switzerland and *Dura Europos* / Kalat as-Salihijja and Palmyra in Syria), such finds also are known from non-military settlements – which would either indicate heightened military activity in that area, or the presence of Roman military police (*beneficiarii*) whose equipment did not differ substantially from that of Legionaries (Lenz-Bernhard 1986). One should also keep

in mind that certain categories of military veterans had the right to keep their arms after discharge. Such weapons occasionally gained new functions, e.g., a certain sacral context (as evidenced by finds of what seem to be intentional votive offerings of weapons in aquatic environments, like at Angeren in Netherlands or Mainz in Germany). This is related with the broader issue of the circulation of weapons inside the Roman Empire.

A portion of the finds of elements of Roman military equipment may be associated with the output of civilian workshops (e.g., unfinished or damaged parts of weapons, possibly intentionally destroyed pieces intended for recycling). The likelihood of such practices is high, particularly in the *limes* zone during the Crisis of the Third Century, with supply shortages and some garrisons being moved to other locations (Pfahl, Reuter 1996, 127, 141). Here the milestone was the reign of Diocletian (284–305) who limited the manufacture of weapons to workshops (*fabricae*) controlled by the State Apparatus (Bishop, Coulston 2006, 233–240, 262–266). The high cost of military equipment, known from the written record, in large part limited its access to wealthy Roman citizens who, at times of conflict or spreading crisis of the State, could raise armed units from among the populace (see Birley 1988; Bakker 1993, 377)⁴.

In Barbarian communities in Northern and Central Europe certain elements of Roman military equipment, like box chapes for instance, may have performed a different role. Some were considered to be items of special, symbolic meaning, as evidenced e.g., by finds from Germanic burials along the middle Elbe or Przeworsk Culture area, where these often are used *pars pro toto* to denote that the deceased had been a warrior. The adoption of certain elements of Roman military symbology by Germanic warriors⁵ and the high material value of imported elements of military equipment doubtless added to the special perception of such items. In effect, both weapons and elements of Roman military equipment, as objects of popular desire, came to be widely copied and imitated by Barbarian artisans. The references to Roman military traditions are well visible across the entire panoply used by Barbarian units, whose internal hierarchy is reconstructed using lavish Late Roman votive offerings from north European bogs (e.g., Illerup and Nydam in Denmark, Thorsberg in Germany, etc.). Box chapes of sword scabbards are one of the elements denoting a warrior's higher stature. These were made at Germanic workshops and attached to scabbards worn in like manner to their Roman inspirations⁶ (e.g., Carnap-Born-

4 A separate issue – one worth mention, yet difficult to examine with precision – is hunting, an activity during which certain weapon types were used outside a military context (Pfahl, Reuter 1996, 136–138).

5 According to some scholars such symbolism was popularized in Germanic circles by warriors from the Elbe basin area and serving in the *auxilia* after the mid 3rd century (Werner 1973).

6 The sword, in a scabbard suspended on a broad belt worn over the right shoulder (*balteus*), was traditionally worn at the left hip (Coulston 1987; Ubl 2013, ill. 295).

heim 1992; Ilkjær 1997; 2001b; 2001c; Rau, Carnap-Bornheim 2012; Kontny 2019a).

The high incidence of scabbard and belt fittings finds along the Rhine and Upper Danube indicates the substantial scale of their manufacture there, which satisfied the demand of Roman units stationed on the border (*Limes Germanicum*). Particularly numerous in those areas are iron chapes and scabbard fittings dated to the 2nd and 3rd centuries (Map 1), setting them apart from Britannia and its numerous – and diverse – types of fittings made from copper alloys (e.g., the particularly popular one-piece, cast *Novaesium* type chapes (Biborski, Grygiel 2015, 128; Kontny 2019b).

The above observations point to belts with silver fittings incrustated with *niello* being manufactured in the final decades of the 3rd century mostly in the (Danubian) *limes* zone and worn chiefly by Legion officers. The fittings being crafted at civilian workshops located around military centres led to the sets being highly uniform, yet still possessing individual features.



Map 1. Discoveries of *cingulum* fittings (yellow squares) and *niello* decorated chapes (yellow dots) from the 2nd half of 3rd century (acc. Mráv 2011; edit. T. Nowakiewicz)

The *cingulum*, sword, and scabbard were symbols of military service and of the bearer's status, and often the most decorated element of personal equipment. The belt and scabbard fittings' lavish ornamentation (and probably symbolic content as well), along with being made from silver, led to

these being used for as long as possible: they were often transferred and reused on new belts and scabbards, and occasionally ending up hoarded due to their silver content (such examples are known from contexts dated to the early 4th century; Mráv 2011). An example of such extended use of silver elements of a belt is the strap/leather fitting with mostly empty sockets of *niello* nests and worn gilding from the *Brigetio* burial dated to the first decades of the 4th century (Mráv 2010; 2011).

5. Iconographic analysis

The preserved fittings from the parade assemblage from Nidajno are a valuable iconographic source in light of their lavish decorations with figural presentations accompanied with geometric elements, all combined into a unique composition. In-depth analysis of each of these components will allow for an attempt to identify the underlying idea or message.

5.1. Palmetto fitting (no. 8)

The palmetto fitting provides us with the richest iconographic content (Ill. 18). The composition it bears is divided into three sections. The first, counting from the top of the vertically arranged fitting, includes the “crown” of the palmetto, composed of five “leaves” and six “branches” ending in bird heads. Between the branches, four additional silver bird heads are placed. The second section is located inside the “crown” in the central segment of the fitting. Here we have the presentation of a hippocampus, placed on a black background with a regular, geometric shape. The third, bottom-most section, when viewed vertically – i.e., the “trunk” of the palmetto, presents an equine-human hybrid on a gold background.



Ill. 18. Palmetto fitting from Nidajno with a tri-part arrangement of presentations (Photo M. Bogacki)

The various elements of the composition are arranged in a manner allowing them to be viewed in three perspectives: vertically, it looks like a tree; horizontally, the central element is the hippocampus swimming towards the left¹. When the tree is turned 180° the dominant element now becomes the equine-human hybrid. The axis of symmetry runs along the whole length of the object, being disrupted only by the presentations of the hippocampus in the centre and by the equine-human hybrid.

¹ This horizontal layout was used in other fittings from this set.

Palmetto motif

The motif of a palmetto, or a tree whose crown is sheltering birds, has a very long tradition in European culture and art, being well visible from Antiquity to the Middle Ages. It is associated with the ash tree (*Fraxinus excelsior L.*) mentioned by Pliny the Elder (*Historia Naturalis* XVI, 24, 62), which supposedly warded off dragons. Its presentations appear in late Antiquity and the early Middle Ages, and in West European Christian art they are recorded from the 7th century. In the *Physiologus* this tree assumes the form of a *peredixion*, i.e., a tree with symmetrical branches, whose right side does not differ from the left and which protects birds from an evil dragon (*Physiologi i Aviarium*). In Viking art its symbology is interpreted in both pagan (the mythological Yggdrasil ash tree) and Christian contexts (Eliade 1993). On the other hand, in Asian shamanism the tree was regarded as the *axis mundi*: through its roots it connected the darkness of the underworld to the trunk – which symbolizes the human world – while the crown reaches esoteric heights, the domain of birds, of light, and of spirits (Hoppál 2009, 248–249).

The palmetto-shaped fitting does not have any analogies in published archaeological material. Some degree of similarity may be noted with the Roman palmetto or tree-shaped votive plaques (see Nowakiewicz, Rzeszotarska-Nowakiewicz 2012, 106, ill. 75a, b). These may possibly have served as inspiration for the arrangement of presentations on the Nidajno palmetto fitting, and thus they are a relevant iconographic point of reference and are deserving of a closer look.

Silver (less commonly, gold and bronze)² votive plaques were a popular element of Roman religious life in the 1st-4th centuries. The largest number of finds comes from the north-western and Danubian provinces of the Empire. Nevertheless their incidence stretches from Britannia through Gaul, Germania, Rhaetia, Noricum, Pannonia, Moesia, and Dacia up to Galatia. Most were discovered in areas previously settled by Celts and along the *limes*. The total number of discovered plaques is 525, including 40 gold examples, of which 11 come from Dacia (Birkle 2013, 191–192; Ciongradi 2013, 128).

The shape of votive plaques is derived from that of a leaf, palmetto, or a feather. All bear some sort of symbolic message, but most scholars identify the shape as related with palm leaves or branches – the symbols of victory, as well as an element closely linked with the sacrificial cult (Henig 2005, 135; Crerar 2006, 76–77)³. However, it should be emphasized that the form of a palmetto, i.e., a stylized palm tree or branch, had been a motif in Celtic art since the La Tene

2 A unique find is a palmetto shaped votive plaque from lead discovered in backfill layers of an ancient branch of the Rhine in Cologne (Germany), in a context dated to the early 2nd century AD. In contrast to plaques made by repoussé, this example was cast in a stone mould. The *votum* is dedicated to Fortuna-Tyche, presented inside a temple *aedicula* with two spiral columns, crowned with an arch with archivolt. Beneath the *aedicula* the hatching probably marks the border between the profane and divine spaces. A *caduceus* was placed above the temple (Schäfer 2010, ill. 1–3; 2011, 273, ill. 1–3).

3 This may be the source of the Latin name for such offerings – *palma argentea* (Steidl 2019, 112).

period. Also the Dacians used the motif of a palmetto and leaf in their decorations of exquisite objects. In light of the area where most of such plaques had been found⁴, it is theorized that these reflect Celtic traditions of stylized Holy Trees. The Celtic belief in the holiness of trees was shared by other peoples of the *Barbaricum*, with Greeks and Romans also associating them with the original temples to their gods. This runs against another view occasionally voiced in the literature – namely, that the origin of such plaques lies in the East, as suggested by the use of a palm branch. Interestingly, this form was most popular in areas of fiercest clashes between local inhabitants and the Roman army on the *limes* – locations of a permanent Roman military presence (Birkle 2013, 148, 191–192; Ciongradi 2013, 127–128, 141–142)⁵.

The plaques were cut out from silver, bronze, or gold sheet. Their surfaces were decorated with patterns resembling the texture of leaves or feathers, applied by stamping or *repoussé* (Ger. *Pressblech*). Most of the simplest plaques were made to a very similar template: these usually include a roughly triangular “stem” with “projections” emerging from it. The top of the plaque usually takes the form of a stylized, open palmetto with leaves decorated by oblique hatching. The majority of plaques are decorated with embossed parallel lines, emerging at an angle from the main “trunk” centrally located on the object. In more elaborate specimens this basic arrangement is augmented with a multilayered crowning of “branches” and other decorative elements. Thus embossed, thin metal plaques were sufficiently durable and flexible to be set up vertically (Marzinzik 2019, 172–173).

In most plaques the panel in their lower, wider part is used to present repousse figures of one or several deities, occasionally with an inscription dedicating it to a specific deity. The gods usually are presented whole, frontally, inside an element of architecture – *aedicula*, i.e., a temple niche topped by an arch or gable roof, in many cases marked with a simple border. This element in turn is surrounded with a ribbed frame, one often including a broader background consisting of repousse – etched or hatched – fields. The figural presentations are made by impressing bronze matrices, counter-dies, or stamps⁶ (Crerar 2006, 71, 74–75; Birkle 2013, 148; Ciongradi 2013, 128; Marzinzik 2019, 172–173).

The inscriptions and presentations indicate that most of the people making the offerings belonged to the Roman or Romanized populations of the northwestern or Danubian provinces. The inscriptions invoke Greco-Roman, Oriental, and local (Celtic, Dacian) deities. The gods, owing

4 Tree-, palm-, or leaf-shaped votive plaques are found mostly in areas of formerly dense Celtic settlement, although they are present along the entire *limes*.

5 Gold and silver votive plaques from the Roman Period are deemed to be a continuation – in a new, more lasting format – of offerings of plants to the gods in the La Tene Period (Ciongradi 2013, 141).

6 In many cases we are capable of identifying central presentations made with the same stamp, yet in various combinations with other elements of the composition. This tells us that plaques were made using several stamps, and not a single stamp with the entire design. Identical plaques are practically unheard of, all having some sort of individual features (Crerar 2006, 71, 74–75; Birkle 2013, 148).

to the process of *interpretatio romana*, are always presented as Roman Imperial deities, often with Celtic epithets, such as Cocidius, Abandinus, Senuna. For example Mars bears the epithets of Alator, Toutates, Deus, or Dominus Augustus (Schäfer 2010; 2011, 275–276; Ciongradi 2013, 141–142).



Ill. 19. Votive plaques from deposits: a – Weissenburg, Germany (Steidl 2019, 113); b–c – Barkway, Hertfordshire, England (© The Trustees of the British Museum; https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/H_1817-0308-7, accessed on: 12.07.2020); d–f – Ashwell, Hertfordshire, England (Hobbs, Jackson 2010, ill. 104); g – fitting no. 8 from Nidajno, fragment (Photo M. Bogacki)

The best known finds of votive plaques from Great Britain come from hoards discovered at Stony Stratford, Buckinghamshire⁷, at Barkway, Hertfordshire, and from the Roman town *Durobrivae* at Water Newton, Cambridgeshire (Crerar 2006, 71). Seven silver plaques were excavated at Barkway, including five dedicated to Mars Alator, Mars Toutates, Mars, and Vulcan (Jackson, Burleigh 2018). The plaques from Barkway depicting Vulcan and Mars Toutates are examples of presentations typical of Britannia (Ill. 19: b–c; Henig 2005, 133–134; Crerar 2006, 71)⁸. The Stony Stratford hoard included 32 silver plaques dedicated to Mars and Victoria, Apollo, Mars and Vulcan (Crerar 2006, 72; Ciongradi 2013, 128). Twenty leaf-shaped silver (13) and gold (7) offerings were found in 2002 in a hoard at Ashwell, Hertfordshire (Ill. 19: d–f). Two gold and five silver specimens are dedicated to the goddess Senune, presented as Minerva in an *aedicula*. The other examples depict deities such as Minerva, Victoria, Sol – and Roma, Mars, and Mercury. At Hockwold cum Wilton in Norfolk County, eight votive plaques have been discovered: six bronze and two silver. The five bronze plaques from Godmanchester, Cambridgeshire, were dedicated to an otherwise unknown god Abandinus. Nine bronze votive plaques dated from the 1st to 4th centuries were unearthed at the Gallo-Roman temple to Mercury at Uley, Gloucestershire. Nineteen votive plaques from Water Newton are dated to the 4th century and are dedicated to Christ, showing that this form of devotion also found a place in Christian religious life (Crerar 2006, 74, 84–85; Ciongradi 2013, 128, 137).

Some eighty silver plaques from Vichy in France (*Aquae Calidae*, Galia Aquitania) are cut in the shape of leaves, of trees, of trees with figural presentations, or trees with a dedication to Sabazios. The Brumath hoard from France (*Brocomagus*, Germania Superior), consisting mostly of goods robbed from a temple, included 22 silver leaf-shaped plaques dedicated to *Matronae*, *Genius* (*Augusti?*), Diana, Minerva, Victoria, Mars, Apollo, Minerva, and Mercury (Schäfer 2010; 2011, 275–276; Ciongradi 2013, 136).

At the Little St. Bernard's Pass in the Western Alps, in a building probably serving as a mountain temple, nine silver offerings were discovered: six dedicated to Jupiter, and one each to Mars and Hercules. A gold specimen plus four from silver, dedicated to the goddess *Dea Nortia*, were discovered at Bolsena in Italy (*Volsinii Novi*, Etruria; Ciongradi 2013, 128, 137).

The largest assemblage of silver votive plaques (130) comes from the Hagenbach hoard from Germany⁹. These specimens are long and narrow, with the central “stem” serving as the base

7 About fifty fragments deposited in an urn; six include figural presentations (Crerar 2006, 71).

8 On the British Isles Mars was also associated with smithing, as exemplified by the plaques dedicated to Mars and Vulcan from Barkway and Stony Stratford (Henig 2005, 35).

9 After the hoard from Neupotz on the Rhine, this is the second largest find of Roman vessels and bronze objects discovered in Europe. It consists of over 400 individual artefacts: objects made from silver, bronze, lead, and iron, looted by Germanics in western Roman provinces in the 3rd century and lost to the Rhine river during a skirmish with Roman forces on their way home. Most of the loot originated from Aquitania, from areas to the north of the Pyrenees (especially the silver votive plaques and jewellery), and from

for obliquely rising “branches”. Some are topped by a field with an *aedicula*, others have crescent-shaped tops. Thirty-four plaques have an inscription inside the *aedicula*, most are dedicated to Mars (Schäfer 2010; 2011, 275–276; Ciongradi 2013, 136).

Eleven of the silver votive plaques from the Weissenburg hoard in Bavaria (*Biriciana*, Rhaetia)¹⁰ bear figural presentations, and one an inscription, as well (Ill. 19: a). All are similarly shaped: the lower section includes a rectangular or trapezoid field with a depiction of a deity inside a frame. The background of the presentation is hatched. The top of the plaque consists of a central, triangular leaf and two side leaves, bent downwards. Figural presentations on several plaques from this hoard were made with the same patrix, implying that they were crafted more or less in the same period and at the same workshop. A feature of the Weissenburg plaques is the high variety of presentations: triads of Minerva, Apollo, and Mercury; of Mars, Mercury, and Hercules; and of *Genius Populi Romani*, Luna, and Victoria (Kellner, Zahlhaas 1983, 13–17, ill. 5–9; Donderer 2004, 242–245). In turn five silver votive plaques from Heddernheim (*Nida*, Germania Superior) were dedicated to Jupiter Dolichenus (Ciongradi 2013, 137).

The hoard from Mauer an der Url in Austria (Noricum) included 28 silver plaques shaped like a triangular elongated leaf, with three bosses. In the lower segment of 21 of those plaques we find a field with an *aedicula* or *tabula ansata*, with etched, punched, or engraved inscriptions. The majority are dedicated to Jupiter, the rest to Juno and Hercules. All come from an unknown shrine to Jupiter Dolichenus (Noll 1980). At Petronell-Carnuntum (*Carnuntum*, Panonia Superior) three gold, five bronze, and two silver plaque were discovered. One was dedicated to the Sun – Sol (Ciongradi 2013, 137).

The hoard from Tekija in Serbia (*Transdierna*, Moesia) included six silver votive plaques. These have the *aedicula* form, similarly to votive plaques from North Africa (kept in Römisch-Germanische Museum in Cologne), votums for Isis and Serapis from Dousch (Kharga Oasis, Egypt), seven votive plaques from Baudacet (Belgium), from Niederbieber (Germany) and to the two silver examples from Alba-Iulia (*Apulum*, Romania). The presentation of the *aedicula* often takes the form of a relief or a drawing (Ciongradi 2013, 128, 137).

The shrine at the holy spring at *Germisara* in Romania (Dacia Superior) yielded eight gold plaques; two silver specimens from *Apulum* are known. The deities in the presentations or men-

the area of today’s western Switzerland (bronze vessels and iron objects); and later brought to lands along the Rhine, in the north-west of the Roman Empire (Petrovsky, Bernhard 2016). The votive plaques were probably looted from a temple in Aquitania (Schäfer 2010; 2011, 275–276).

10 The deposit, discovered in 1979 on the main street of a Roman camp, the *vicus*, is one of the largest hoards from the middle of the 3rd century from the part of the province to the north of the Alps. It consisted of 114 objects: 11 silver votive plaques, 16 high quality bronze statuettes of Roman deities, 19 richly decorated bronze vessels, and masks from parade armour – plus tools and religious cult objects. The deposit is interpreted as either a temple or private hoard looted by the Alemanns (Kellner, Zahlhaas 1983; Steidl 2019). Another interpretation is that this is a merchant’s hoard, unrelated with military events (Donderer 2004).

tioned in inscriptions are nymphs, Aesculapius and Hygieia, *Iupiter Optimus Maximus*, Diana, Fortuna, Hercules, and *Liber Pater* (Ciongradi 2013, 128–132, 138)¹¹.

The manner of setting up and displaying votive plaques vertically varied, and was probably related with the location and votive context: temple, shrine, home altar, or holy spring. For example, it is assumed that the 130 silver votive plaques from the Hagenbach hoard had been vertically set up in a shrine to Mars in specially prepared places. The sacrifices were probably inserted into some soft material, likely sand, and the whole assembly surmounted with an arch made from silver sheet (Petrovsky 2006, 193). It is possible that a similar manner of presentation had been used for the silver votive plaques at the shrine to Dolichenus at Mauer an der Url, although another possibility is that these had been slotted into a split wooden plank. The plaque from Cologne has a projection in its base, originally inserted into some wooden or stone holder. Such votive plaque holders are depicted in the relief decoration of altars discovered in the French Pyrenees (Noll 1980; Engels 1990; see Crerar 2006, 80; Birkle 2013). Some plaques, e.g., from North Africa, have openings for nails, suggesting that they had been fastened to walls or boards (Künzl, E. 1997, 66; Crerar 2006, 80). Plaques without holes or “legs” were simply laid upon the altar or at the base of the statue of the relevant deity (Crerar 2006, 80). Offerings were also deposited in the waters of holy springs, like the plaques from Vicarello and *Germisara* (Ciongradi 2013, 142; Marzinzik 2019, 172–173).

Starting in the 1st century AD metal votums spread across the north-western provinces and radiated from there along the *limes* (Ciongradi 2013, 127). The peak of this phenomena is dated to the 2nd half of the 2nd and to the 3rd centuries, as indicated by the chronology of several deposits containing such artefacts. Most of the plaques from Germania Superior and Inferior, Rhaetia, and Noricum are dated to between the mid 2nd and mid 3rd centuries AD. Their mass manufacture took place from the end of the 2nd century to the start of the Barbarian invasions across the *limes*. In the 4th century this typical pagan form and practice was adopted by Christians in Britain, as shown by votive plaques at Water Newton (Crerar 2006, 83–86, ill. 4; Birkle 2013, 140–145)¹².

11 In total twelve votive plaques from Roman Dacia are known. The tree remaining gold plaques probably come from one of the holy spring shrines (Ciongradi 2013, 128, ill. 9–11). The holy spring context is dominated by female and by healing-related nature deities. Their cult at those locations dates to pre-Roman times. Metal offerings were cast into the pool as unrecoverable sacrifices (*ex voto*). A similar context applies to the three silver plaques from the thermal springs at Vicarello in Italy. The goddess Senuna, to which the plaques at Ashwell were dedicated, was probably the spring's deity, similarly to *Sulis Minerva* from the English Bath (*Aquae Sulis*). Another type of metal offering - besides plaques - noted at shrines such as at the source of the Seine at the Gallo-Roman Source-Seine, thermal springs at Bath, the Coventina spring on the Hadrian Wall, mineral springs at Chamalières (Puy-de-Dôme) in France or Bad Pyrmont in Germany, were bronze statuettes, fibulae, vessels and coins, as well as wooden statuettes of gods and presentations of parts of human anatomy (Ciongradi 2013, 138–139).

12 The Anicylla plaque from Water Newton is an example of syncretization of pagan content with the cult of the Christian God (Crerar 2006, 72, 83). Such expressions of piety, with archaic roots, i.e., the offering of votums at temples, are still found in “popular religiosity”. It is found in various places in Europe with

Most deposits with votive plaques from the lands of the *Imperium Romanum* are interpreted to be evidence of Celtic cultural influence, as indicated by e.g., the tree-like form of the votums. The cultural exchange involved the autochthons and immigrants, these principally being Roman soldiers. The deposits with votive plaques discovered in the neighbourhood of Roman military camps point to the role of movements of the Roman army in the spread of a new, Imperial canon of religious depictions in Rome's northern provinces. This process was particularly intensive in the *limes* zone along the Rhine and Danube, the centre of contacts propagating new models and ideas, whereas the local elements point towards strong attachment to local cults with deep-going roots, and their links to local shrines and temples.

In spite of the shared form and basics of shape, every votive plaque has individual features. Besides the general style common to votive plaques from different provinces, there existed a local repertoire of forms, thus indicating manufacture at specific workshops. Such workshops, located close to cult centres, sold the votums to pilgrims who could then offer the plaques at the shrine, or take them home to either deposit at their *lararium* or to keep as a souvenir from their trip to the shrine. The votive plaques were probably pre-made before being brought to the shrine for customization, as indicated by the variability and individual character of inspirations (Schäfer 2010; 2011, 275–276; Ciongradi 2013, 138–139, 141–142).

Metal votive plaques are some of the more costly sacrifices. Gold ones were the most valuable, particularly if decorated with presentations of deities and bearing personalized inscriptions. In most provinces leaf- or palm-shaped votive plaques were an offering acknowledged by the faithful and accepted by temples (Crerar 2006, 82–86). Participants in the practice were both Romans and members of the local Romanized population, making for a quite cosmopolitan group of people (Ciongradi 2013, 141–142).

Comparing the palmetto fitting from Nidajno with popular types of votive plaques shows more in common than with any other utilitarian art objects from the Empire and surrounding areas. For example, the plaques from the Ashwell hoard have a “crown” made from volute-like projections surrounding the central presentation. The silver specimen from Barkway dedicated to Mars Toutates (Ill. 20: a)¹³, shaped like a broad leaf tapering towards the top, crowned with three leaf-like projections, has a *tabula ansata* with an inscription dedicated to this deity instead of a figural presentation (Crerar 2006, 71, ill. 3). Another silver (and gilded) plaque from the Barkway hoard, dedicated to Mars Alator, has a central part with a presentation of the deity in an *aedicula*, with a *tabula ansata* and inscription underneath (Ill. 20: b).

Catholic Sanctuaries, e.g., at those focused on the cult of the Virgin Mary like the ones in Częstochowa at Jasna Góra in Poland, at Fatima in Portugal, and in Lourdes in France.

13 It is larger than average (height 51.25 cm, width 25.6 cm, weight 282 g) compared to other examples from the Empire (Crerar 2006, 71).

It is evident that the hippocampus on the geometric backdrop in the central part of the “crown” of the Nidajno fitting occupies the place typically used for an aedicula with presentation of the deity. The anthropomorphic presentation of an equine-human hybrid beneath the central element of the composition, turned around by 180°, occupies the space where one would expect a *tabula* with inscription and/or a projection used to mount the plaque on some base, and is an inventive adaptation of the template known from votive plaques (Ill. 20: c).



Ill. 20. a–b – plaques with *tabula ansata* and *aedicula* dedicated to Mars Toutates and Mars Alator from Barkway, England (Crerar 2006, ill. 3); c – fitting no. 8 from Nidajno (Photo M. Bogacki); d – votive plaque hoard from Ashwell, England (© The Trustees of the British Museum; https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/H_2003-0901-24; accessed on: 12.06.2020)

An iconographic element unique to the Nidajno artefact is that of the bird heads forming the “crown” of the palmetto fitting, something not encountered elsewhere in votive plaques. The inspiration for this arrangement is discernable in another category of finds – among decorated utilitarian objects.

Bird head volutes motif

The elaborate palmetto crown of fitting no. 8, topped with the tri-part “fan”, formed by five pairs of bird heads turned outward and towards one another, has less impressive counterparts in e.g., elements of horse tack discovered at various sites along the *limes*, linked with the Roman military presence there.

Pendants for horse tack or harnesses were designed in a manner allowing for their unhindered suspension from leather straps. They were usually attached to a hinge, eyelet, or a simple hook, connecting the pendant to the bottom of a phalera strung on a leather strap. Almost invariably pendants were cast from copper alloys (usually brass), coated with tin or silver and, quite commonly, decorated with punched or engraved plant motifs and/or *niello*. *Trifid pendants* are one of the most varied and widespread forms of horse tack pendants from the 1st century AD (Bishop 1988, 96–98, pl. 6, ill. 24).

One such example is the *trifid pendant* from *Augusta Raurica* (Augst, Switzerland). Made from silver-coated bronze, it represents the variant where the central leaf was enlarged at the expense of the external duo, turned inside. Bird-head shaped bosses, with “beaks” facing outward, are placed on the upper edges of the leaves. The fastening is also a (simplified) bird-head. The pendant is decorated with stamped plant motifs, with two symmetrical crescent shaped openings. Its five-part top is shaped like a shell or a reversed palmetto (Ill. 21: a; Deschler-Erb 1999, 51–53, 166, ill. 55, no. 537).

This object is similar to type 1n *trifid pendants* acc. Mike Bishop (1988, 142–146, pl. 6, ill. 43: 1n), although its bird-head shaped attachment draws upon type 7 – particularly the 7g–7h variant, which includes *bird-headed*, *winged* pendants (Bishop 1988, 149–151, pl. 6, ill. 46). This variant of *trifid pendants* appeared during the reign of Claudius, and faded away sometime in the Flavian period (Deschler-Erb 1999, 51–53, 166, ill. 55, no. 537).

An even more evident bird-head motif is visible on the lunula type horse tack pendant from a water deposition at Empel in the Netherlands (Ill. 21: b). Both arms of the lunula, decorated with a vine ornament, are topped with eagle heads (in profile), with the central element being shell-shaped. The artefact is dated to the 1st century AD (Nicolay 2007, 57, 188, ill. 5.13, pl. 89: 83.1).



Ill. 21. a – horse tack pendant from Augst / *Augusta Raurica*, Switzerland (Deschler-Erb 1999, ill. 55, no. 537); b – pedant from around Empel, Netherlands (Nicolay 2007, ill. 5.13); c – horse tack pendant from Budaörs, Hungary, burial 107 (Ottományi 2016, pl. XXIX: 2); d–e – late La Tene shield-boss with pelta-shaped ends formed by bird-heads from Budaörs, Hungary, burial 117; detail (Ottományi 2016, pl. XLIII: 5)

Thus, this motif is widely present in military decorations along the upper Danube and the Rhine in the 1st century AD, in the context of Roman military camps, although some elements were already present in locally made objects. A very similar shape may be seen in the ending of a late La Tene boss protecting the spine of a parade shield from burial 117 at the cemetery at Budaörs, Kamaraerdő, near Budapest (Hungary; Ill. 21: d–e). This early Roman Period burial is associated with the earliest stages of the use of this necropolis¹⁴ (Ottományi 2016, 43, 355, pl. XLIII: 5). Both the shape and the decorations of the boss are rooted in La Tene traditions preceding Roman expansion. Its central part was hemispherical, thus dating the Budaörs shield to the last phase of development of shields with spines. The pelta-shaped ends of the spine are decorated with fields framed with arches, ornamented with circles with dot motifs and outward break-like projections.

¹⁴ Besides the boss, the grave also included the skeletons of two horses and their tack, an iron spearhead, and the skeleton of a dog with a collar studded with bronze nails. The site was used as a burial ground by the local Pannonian-Celtic population, the Eravisci, around 12 BC subjugated by the Romans (Ottományi 2016, 43, 355, pl. XLIII: 5).

Scholars researching this cemetery have not found any analogies for that last motif, only suggesting that it resembles decorations of bronze objects from North Balkan bronze working workshops from the 1st century AD, with the characteristic feature of dividing surfaces with patterns of arches and decorating them with dotted circles. The burial itself, in light of its equipment and rites, cannot be dated to earlier than the 1st half of the 2nd century AD (Mráv 2016, 493–496, ill. 4: 3, 4)¹⁵. Likely elements of this earlier tradition percolated into the decorating style used on later objects, such as horse pendants in the shape of inverted lunula, discovered in burial 107 at the aforementioned Budaörs cemetery. Its arms, turned up and inward, conclude in stylized bird heads (Ill. 21: c). This burial dates between the mid 2nd and mid 3rd centuries (Ottományi 2016, 38, 41, 341, pl. XXIX: 2).

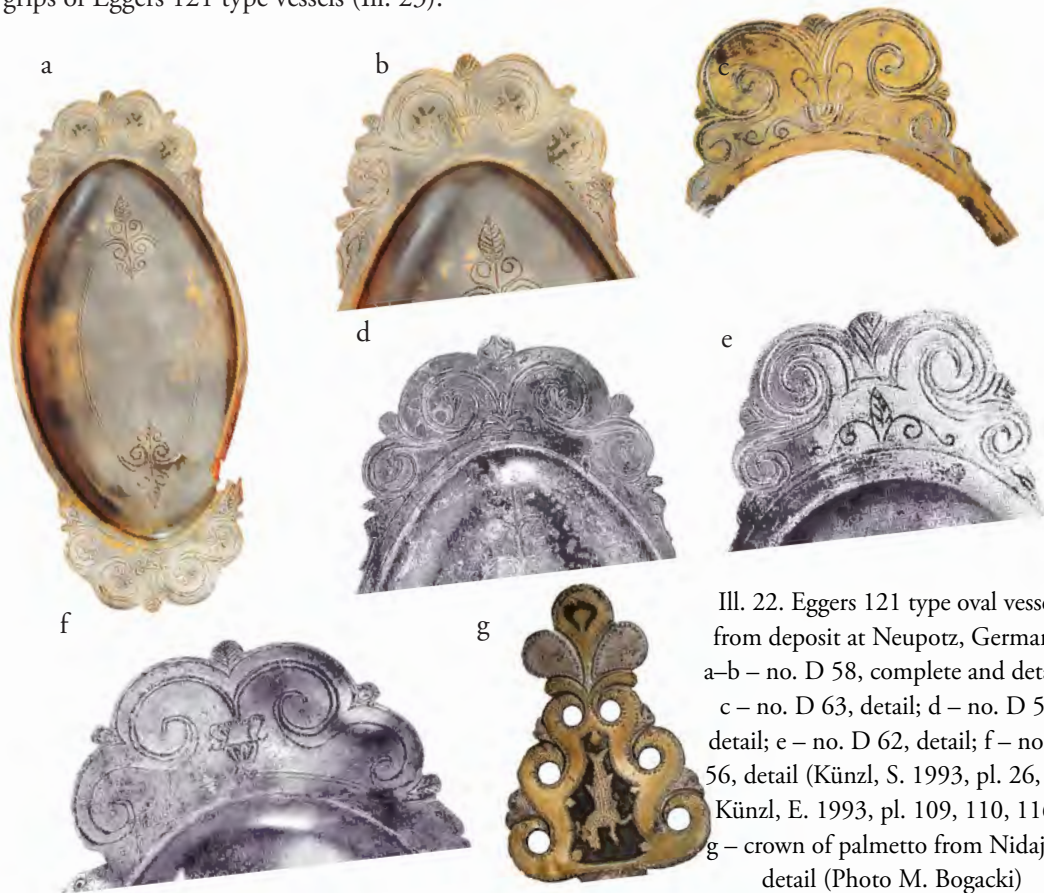
The motif of a palmetto constructed from volutes and with zoomorphic elements is also present in decorations of civilian luxury products, such as metal Roman Provincial tableware. In this context special attention should be drawn to the characteristic decorations on the grips of oval Eggers 121 type vessels from the deposit at Neupotz in Germany (type ND 22 acc. S. Künzl; ill. 22; Eggers 1951; Künzl, S. 1993, pl. 25–27)¹⁶. Vessels used as platters to serve food were made from brass and then coated with silvery-shine tin. They possess analogies and prototypes among silver relief-decorated wares (Petrovsky, Bernhard 2016, 250).

The manner in which the decorations of the grips are composed is reminiscent of the “baroque” arrangement of the “crown” of the palmetto fitting from Nidajno. The shared elements are pairs

15 Probably in the 2nd century AD the parade shield lost its relevance and was no longer used to display social standing. One may theorize that it was kept within the family for a long time, passed down generation by generation, probably part of some sort of family tradition, and in the 2nd century deposited in a horse’s grave. The meaning of this act is probably impossible to decipher, yet doubtless it was intentional. From the very same cemetery, from burial 126 with a two-wheeled cart, we have a Roman parade shield with bronze boss decorated with a medallion bearing the bust of the goddess Luna, as well as a set of six horse leather strap fittings shaped like hexagonal shields, as well as a *Ringknaufschwert* type sword (Mráv 2016, 506–512, 523–524, ill. 15–17). In the opinion of Zsolt Mráv, the role of a status symbol expressed up to the 1st century by the parade shield with bronze boss from the late La Tène, in the 2nd century was assumed by a Roman military shield, the result of the local population gaining Roman citizenship through their service in the *auxilia*. The impressive shield from burial 117 at Budaörs is the first spectacular piece of evidence that even in the Roman Period the Eravisci tribal elite possessed a set of honorary and nobility-conferring objects solidly rooted in old traditions. The existence of such a local elite under Augustus (27 BC – 14 AD) is also testified by other finds from the area of the late Celtic settlement dated to La Tène D at Budaörs, which survived to the Roman Period, specifically fragments of *terra sigillata* pottery from the Augustus era. Presumably a descendant of this elite, buried in grave 126, a soldier of the *auxilia*, gained the honour of Roman citizenship (Mráv 2016, 495–496, ill. 4: 3–4).

16 The Neupotz deposit, the source of the largest number of Eggers 121 type vessels (13 pieces), was looted from Germanian raiders in 259–260 AD. Part of their loot from Gaul was lost to the river during a skirmish with Roman forces when crossing the Rhine on their way home, with the rest reaching Germania (see Künzl, S. 1993; Künzl, E. 1993; Becker 2016; Luik 2016; Petrovsky, Bernhard 2016). In such a context it is interesting to see the deposit including, besides metal tableware and tools, fragments of Roman votive plaques.

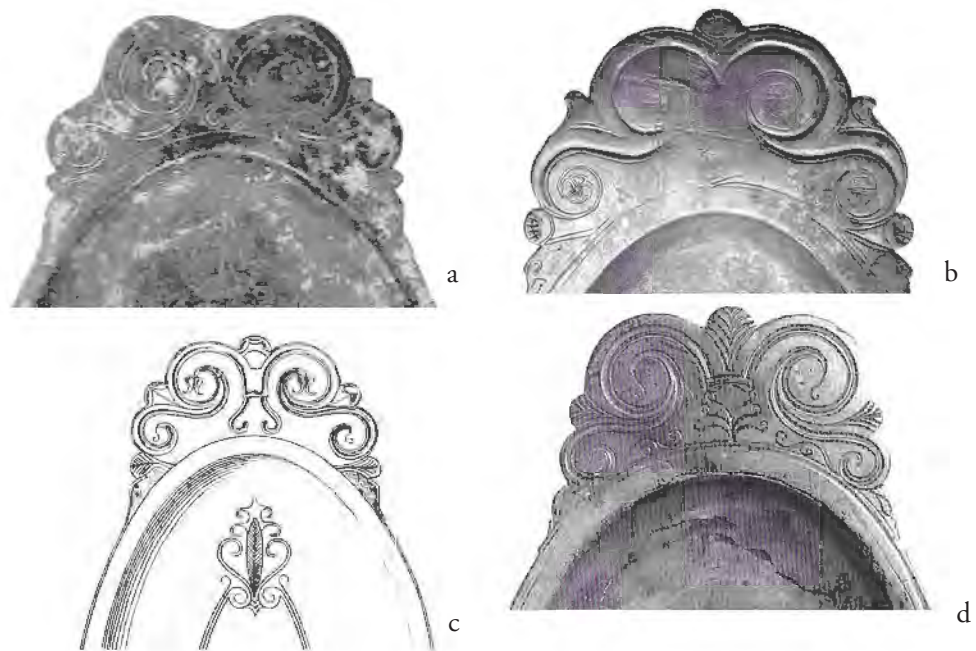
of volutes separated by “wedges” and the “crown’s” shell-shaped or “feather-fan” top. Still, some differences are apparent: the palmetto from Nidajno has three pairs of “upturned” volutes, while the grips of Eggers 121 type vessels are formed from two pairs of volutes which are always “turned down”. Additionally the volutes on the fitting from Nidajno are formed from golden bird heads, and not by vines. The role of “wedges” in fitting no. 8 is performed by two pairs of silver bird heads: the upper pair, between the top and middle volutes, faces up, the lower pair, between the middle and bottom volutes – faces down, similarly to the bird heads decorating the base of the grips of Eggers 121 type vessels (Ill. 23).



Ill. 22. Eggers 121 type oval vessels from deposit at Neupotz, Germany: a–b – no. D 58, complete and details; c – no. D 63, detail; d – no. D 57, detail; e – no. D 62, detail; f – no. D 56, detail (Künzl, S. 1993, pl. 26, 27; Künzl, E. 1993, pl. 109, 110, 116); g – crown of palmetto from Nidajno, detail (Photo M. Bogacki)

According to Susanna Künzl, Eggers 121 type vessels may be divided into two groups by their morphological features and design of decorations on the grips. A particularly typical feature of group 1 is the precisely made decoration of the inside of the platter. Along the edge we always find two less well defined lines – their regular shape suggests the use of some sort of jig for their making. The grips are decorated with engraved motifs of volutes and leaves. Another characteristic stylistic feature are the broad bands of hatching on the grips, bestowing a three-dimensional effect

to the flowers, leaves, and vines. Occasionally, instead of the typical *kantharos*¹⁷, usually small and clumsy and the base for the two main vines, we find a floral motif. The volutes' vines spiral inward in broad and circular lines, and often terminate inside the volute in a leaf or flower. Two pairs of volutes spiralling “downward” are separated by inserted elements with leaf motifs. On the bases of grips on group 1 vessels from Neupotz the volutes are slightly “stretched”. The grip always includes five beak-like “wedges”: two pairs between the volutes, while the fifth separates the upper two volutes and forms a small “palmetto”. These “wedges” are often very unevenly rounded, which would suggest being leaf-shaped, yet in some cases they are replaced by shells or flowers (simplification often makes it impossible to interpret this element). Bird heads along the edge of the vessel are relatively high, the drawing inside the heads clumsy, yet rich in detail; at times even the texture of the feathers was engraved (Künzl, S. 1993, 179, ill. 63–67, pl. 25–27; Künzl, E. 1993, pl. 108–115).



Ill. 23. Eggers 121 type oval vessels: a – Pontoux, France; b – Hinzerath-Belginum near Trier, Germany; c – Leuna, Halle, Germany, burial 2; d – Vertault, Châtillon-sur-Seine, France (Künzl, S. 1993, ill. 63, 64, 65, 67, 68)

The basic shape of grips of group 2 vessels is close to a square, although the lower S-shaped curvature of the vines usually extends beyond its outline. In contrast to group 1 vessels, here we have

¹⁷ “*Kantharos*–tree-of-life”, or a vessel sprouting a grape vine, is one of the more popular motifs in Roman art. It is common in sepulchral context, symbolizing the font of eternal life after death, and associated with the cult of the god of wine and nature Dionysus-Bacchus. The tree is often accompanied by animals, with birds hiding among the plant’s branches. In the symbolical language of the Ancients the motif of tree-of-life was closely linked with e.g., ancestor worship (Piccottini 2016, 45–55).

only three “wedges” filled with leaf motifs, although shells are not unheard of (e.g., vessel D 66 from Neupotz). Decoration of the interior, mostly based on the *kantharos* motif, is highly detailed and very precisely made. The volutes are not filled, the vines transforming into straight lines. At the base of the *kantharos* or, like in vessel D 62 from Neupotz (Ill. 22: e), at the base of the leaf, additional, fine vines were often placed, sometimes forming a bird’s head. The contours of bird heads inserted as a “wedge” between the lower pair of volutes and the edge of the vessel’s bowl is quite flat and marked with a wavy line. The drawing inside the head consists solely of two curved lines that meet or cross at two points, thus forming the outline of a bird’s eye and nostril. The execution of the decorations is less schematic than in group 1 vessels (Künzl, S. 1993, 185–186, ill. 68–70; Künzl, E. 1993, pl. 116–124).

A large majority of vessels of this type are dated to the 3rd century, like the vessel from Strasbourg in France (235 AD), well dated by the horizon of destruction, and the one from the villa at Rheinfelden in Switzerland (sometime between the mid 3rd century and its destruction in 352 AD). Some of the bronze and silver vessels were used for devotions at home shrines or Roman temples and dedicated to deities, principally to Mercury (Petrovsky, Bernhard 2016, 250). Occasionally such vessels, showing signs of age and wear, are found in earlier layers from the 1st half of the 4th century. (Künzl, S. 1993, 188, 193). Such vessels are found both in hoards (Neupotz), in civilian Roman contexts (destruction layers, e.g., Augst), or even opulent barbarian burials (Leuna and Hassleben in Germany). The main origin of ND 22 group 1 vessels is Galia Belgica and Germania Superior; group 2 – Galia Lugdunensis (Künzl, S. 1993).

The term used for those vessels is “Gallic wares”, in light of the significantly lower quality (in relation to wares of supposedly Italic provenance), peculiarities of styling, type, the manner whereby the elements are conjoined, the raw materials – and the manner of creation. Gallic products are perceived as being characterized by flat decorations of body and widespread use of engraved decorations (but without high relief), as well as punched ornamentation, with circles, concentric circles, triangles, arches etc. At present it is difficult to identify the locations, structure, and stages in the development of Gallic bronze workshops and the scale of their production. What we do know is that at a certain point Gallic producers managed to economically match Italian ones, and then push them out from various markets, such as the Rhine and Danubian provinces (Luik 2016, 219–222, ill. 2: 1, 7, 13).

One should note that the impressive and richly equipped burials of the Hassleben–Leuna group, exempting burial 2 at Leuna and the burial at Hassleben, do not contain Eggers 121 vessels and thus are slightly older. This fact has bearing on the understanding of this particularly dynamic period (Becker 2016, 7, note 15). In this context the differences in the distribution of bowls and platters suggests the existence of different modes of their spread along the *limes*. The evident lack of Eggers 121 type vessels in the *Agri Decumates* might indicate that they no longer regularly reached areas abandoned by Roman units. This means that their manufacture began just before

– or during – the withdrawal of the Roman military from those areas. This allows us to set the *terminus post quem* for the emergence of Eggers 121 vessels in Germania with quite high precision to the middle of the 3rd century (Becker 2016, 7–14, ill. 1, 3, 5).



a

b



c

Ill. 24. a – a worked, stretched deer hide, Russian Siberia 1898 AD (Photo U.T. Sirelius, <https://www.finna.fi/Record/musketti.M012:SUK36:235?lng=en-gb#image>, accessed on: 9.12.2021); b – horse hide, Chile (<https://amarcowetsaltedhides.en.ecplaza.net/products/horse-hides>, accessed on: 29.04.2019); c – fitting no. 8 from Nidajno, detail (Photo M. Bogacki)

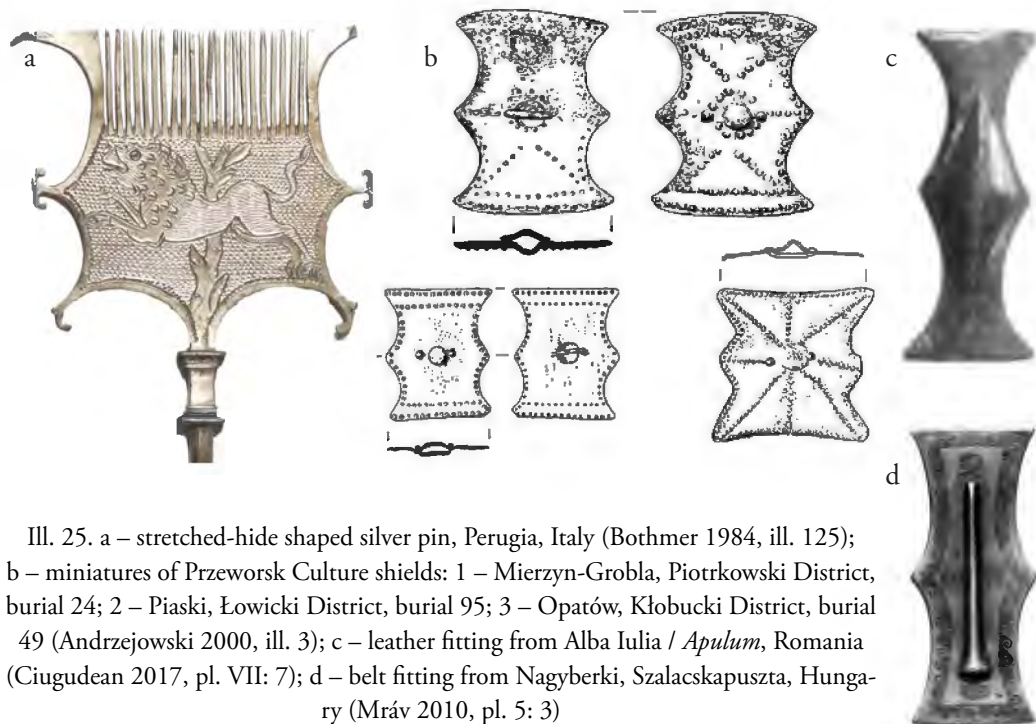
Motif of stretched animal hide

The shape of the geometric field used as a backdrop for the presentation of the hippocampus on the Nidajno palmetto fitting is unique. It resembles a stretched animal hide (Ill. 24). The identification and examination of connotations of this element in ancient material brings up new, interesting observations.

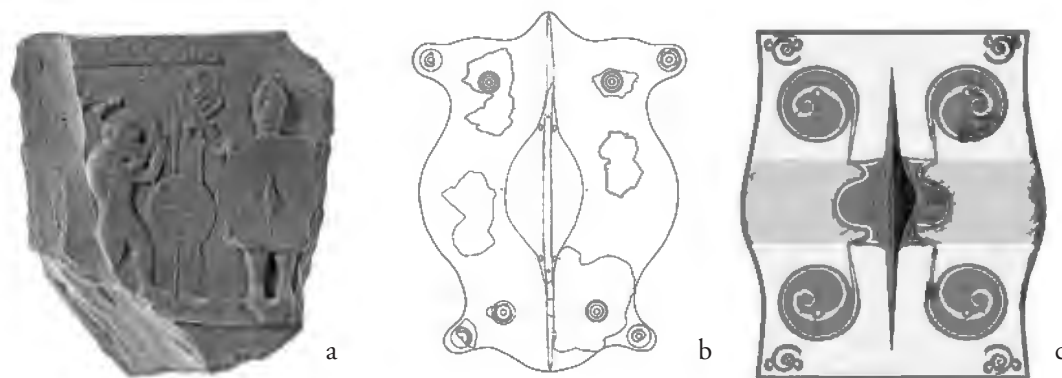
In this context one's mind is drawn to associations with three miniature shields from Przeworsk Culture cemeteries (Opatów, Kłobucki District, site 1, burial 49; Piaski, Łowicki District, site 1, burial 95; Mierzyn-Grobla, Piotrkowski District, site 2, burial 24; Ill. 25: b). These were of rectangular shape, with the longer sides curving inward (Andrzejowski 2000; there further literature). The mini-shields had been discovered as part of burial equipment alongside other miniature amulets, mostly smith's tools: scissors, hammers or knives, occasionally intertwined parts of chain-mail, a common feature of women and children's graves (Andrzejowski 2000; there further literature; Madyda-Legutko, Rodzińska-Nowak, Zagórska-Telega 2010, 457–478). Owing to their similarity it may be assumed that these items had been crafted at a single workshop, maybe even by the same smith (Andrzejowski 2000, 28). Jacek Andrzejowski connects their shape with Celtic shields known from presentations (e.g., Bormio, north Italy; Ill. 26: a) and burial equipment from Dürrnberg near Hallein in Austria (burial 373; Ill. 26: b; Andrzejowski 2000, 23–28, 31–33, ill. 3: 1–3; Egg et al. 2009, 88, ill. 4, 8, 9). Their shape is related with that of Celtic leather shields from the south of Great Britain, as well as depictions of such shields on Celtic and Roman reliefs (Andrzejowski 2000, 32, 37; Farley 2011, 97).

This characteristic shape is interpreted to be an imitation of an animal hide stretched for working and may point towards some sort of special, possibly cult-related or parade use of these items (although the last reconstruction of the shield from Dürrnberg, made from alder wood and originally covered with ox hide, shows that it may had been fully capable of military use; Andrzejowski 2000, 33; Egg et al. 2009, 92–94, ill. 10; Kontny, Rudnicki 2009). The shield from burial 39/2 at Dürrnberg, with a “hide shaped” cover of the spine, is similar to the one from burial 373 (Ill. 26: c). It was made from two overlapping metal sheets riveted along the rib of the spine. The spine is evidently shaped like a stretched hide and sheathed with an iron sheet attached by eight nails. The shield is dated to the developed period of La Tène A (Egg et al. 2009, 95–97, ill. 13: 3).

Generally most miniatures may be interpreted as proof – or relics – of some sort of commonly held religious beliefs and practices typical of societies influenced by the La Tène Culture (Andrzejowski 2000, 37). The symbolic function of such objects was probably different than that of Celtic or Gallo-Roman miniatures, which were treated as votums and sacrificed at special locations – at shrines or inside cult buildings (Andrzejowski 2000, 33–38; there further literature). In the central-eastern *Barbaricum* such objects most likely served as magical amulets and were placed in burials to protect the deceased (Andrzejowski 2000, 39). The miniatures of shields could also have been used in everyday life, due to their decorative and protective aspects, e.g., as elements of dress (Kontny, Rudnicki 2009, 38; Andrzejowski 2000, 37–38; Raczyńska-Kruk, Kruk 2018, 123).



Ill. 25. a – stretched-hide shaped silver pin, Perugia, Italy (Bothmer 1984, ill. 125); b – miniatures of Przeworsk Culture shields: 1 – Mierzyn-Grobla, Piotrkowski District, burial 24; 2 – Piaski, Łowicki District, burial 95; 3 – Opatów, Kłobucki District, burial 49 (Andrzejowski 2000, ill. 3); c – leather fitting from Alba Iulia / *Apulum*, Romania (Ciugudean 2017, pl. VII: 7); d – belt fitting from Nagyberki, Szalacsapuszta, Hungary (Mráv 2010, pl. 5: 3)



Ill. 26. Stretched-hide shaped Celtic shields: a – Bormio, Italy, stone relief; b – Dürrenberg, Austria, burial 373; c – Dürrenberg, Austria, burial 39/2 (Egg et al. 2009, ill. 8, 10, 13: 3)

The three aforementioned miniature stretched-hide shaped shields from Mierzyn-Grobla, Piaski, and Opatów, as well as the other miniatures of hexagonal shields from the southern reaches of the Przeworsk Culture, are dated to stages B2b–C1a of the Roman Period¹⁸. In light of geography and chronology, their closest analogies, even if of more geometric shape, would be Panonian fibulae and belt fittings (Andrzejowski 2000, 27–28, 31–32; Kontny, Rudnicki 2009; Csontos 1999; Kontny 2019a, 204)¹⁹.

The very same shape may be seen in horse harnesses and belt fittings from Dacia – Alba Iulia (*Apulum*; Ill. 25: c), *Porolissum*, Gherla (Cluj) in Romania, as well as Aquilea in Italy, Zugmantel in Germany or Nijmegen in Netherlands. The term used in the literature to describe this form is double-shield shaped mount or propeller-shaped. Johan Nicolay classified these as variant B8. These are broadly dated to the 2nd–3rd centuries AD (Csontos 1999, pl. V: 1–5; Nicolay 2007, pl. 74: B8; Ciugudean 2017, 360–361, 381–382, 404, pl. VII: 7; there further literature).

Other artefacts sharing this form are belt fittings from burial 7 at Neudorf-Bornstein, Kr. Rendsburg-Eckernförde (Germany; Abegg-Wigg 2006) and from the bog site at Ejsbøl-Vest, Haderslev Amt (Denmark; Carnap-Bornheim 2003). Roman Provincial works are perceived as possibly serving as their prototypes, e.g., the late 3rd century silver Roman officer's belt fitting from the Nagyberki hoard (Szalacskapuszta, Hungary; Ill. 25: d; Mráv 2010, 35, pl. 5; 2011, 395, ill. 7–8; Carnap-Bornheim 2003, 244, ill. 1; Przybyła 2018, 479–482). It seems that this shape of fitting also is a direct reference to shield types retaining the geometric shape of stretched animal hides.

The link between animal hides and shields is foremost practical. It was commonplace in the Roman Period *Barbaricum* to cover wooden boards with hides as to strengthen the shield and improve its resistance to blows (Kontny 2019a, 203–205; Warming et al. 2020). The Romans did the very same with their *scuta*, the tall, semi-cylindrical shields protecting almost the entire body. In the times of Augustus *scuta* were covered with hides with unit marks painted on them; the shield edges were reinforced with gutter-like fittings (Kontny 2019a, 207). Such a leather covering (*tegimentum*), dated to 75–125 AD, was discovered on the grounds of the *Matilo* legion camp (Leiden-Roomburg, Netherlands), in Germania Inferior. Its surface was decorated with

18 Horse harness and pendants shaped like hexagonal shields were popular in Roman Provincial military equipment in the 2nd–3rd centuries, at times serving as backdrop for apotropaic *vulva* presentations (see Nicolay 2007, 52–57, pl. 73: B7, pl. 79: B17). This is the shape of elements of tack from e.g., *Aquinum*, and Bulgaria (Csontos 1999, 159, pl. V: 5, 7). In 1st & 2nd-century Roman art a hexagonal shield is often used to represent Germanic warriors and an attribute of the personification of the Germania Province (Hunter 2009, 796–798, pl. 1). It is also present in parade armour sets, e.g., from *Carnuntum* (e.g., Junkelmann 1996, ill. 134). Hexagonal shields were popular inter alia among Germanics, and became standard issue of Roman *auxilia* formations (Bishop, Coulston 2006, 91). In the European *Barbaricum* such shields gradually went out of style in the 2nd century, replaced with circular shields (Andrzejowski 2000, 29–30; Kontny 2019a, 205).

19 Some Pannonian fibulas in the form of shields, dating to the 2nd century and used by women, have a similar shape. Thanks to depictions on tomb stelae, it is known that they were used to fasten the clothes at the clavicles (Csontos 1999, pl. IV–VII; Przybyła 2018, 479–482, ill. 15/47).

a unicorn-shaped accessory and an inscribed *tabula*, both cut out from leather. On the hide's edges we see marks of cuts from the skinning of the animal (Ill. 27).



Ill. 27. *Tegimentum* of shield, Roman *castellum Matilo* (Leiden-Roomburg, Netherlands; Rijksmuseum voor Oudheden, Leiden; phot. J. Lendering, <https://www.livius.org/articles/place/matilo-leiden-room-burg/>, accessed on: 9.12.2021)

The motif of a stretched hide is also known from artefacts without a military context. A woman's burial at the Lake Trasimeno (Perugia, Italy) yielded a silver hairpin with the head doubling as a comb. It was accompanied by a pair of silver *strigili* suspended from a ring and silver vessels: a jug and colander. The assemblage is dated to the 1st century. The head of the hairpin is in the form of a plaque and decorated with engraved scenes of lion hunting: on one side the lion is jumping, and presented against a tree (Ill. 25: a), on the other a Cupid with a bow and hunting dog are poised to attack, also with a tree in the background (Olivier 1965, 182–185, ill. 8–10, 12–13; Bothmer 1984, 66–67, ill. 125–126). The plaque of the head-comb is clearly shaped like a stretched hide, with stylized endings of two pairs of “paws”. It may be assumed that the shaft of the pin was an extension of the lion’s “tail”, and the comb’s teeth – of the lion’s mane, suggestive of this being the hide of a hunting trophy.

The hide-covered shield motif was also used on two horse chanfrons from the Roman hoard at Straubing (*Sorviodurum*, Lower Bavaria; Ill. 28, 29: a). This seems to have been a thief’s loot, who hid his ill-gotten gains in a safe place. The assemblage dated to the 1st third of the 3rd century includes elements of parade armour: fragments of helmets with visors (including seven masks), three pairs of greaves and barding, including seven complete sets of three-part chanfrons. All chan-

frons were made from copper alloy sheet, partly silver plated and gilded. The hoard also contained statuettes of deities, weaponry, and iron tools (Keim, Klumbach 1978 [1951]; Garbsch 1978, 47–51; Junkelmann 1996, 79)²⁰.

Hans Klumbach assigned both chanfrons of relevance to our study to group 2, with a small elongated, octagonal shape (acc. to Marcus Junkelmann – hexagonal) central plate. The central plate of the first example (no. B21) is evidently shaped like a hex- or octagonal shield, with its centre decorated with a bust of Ganymede in a Phrygian cap topped with an eagle. The side plates, topped with outward looking eagle heads, have mesh-pattern eye covers, also shaped like Ganymede's head, above which we have a soaring Victoria with a wreath and palm branch in her hand (Ill. 28: a; Keim, Klumbach 1978 [1951], 29–30, pl. 32, 34: 2–3, 35: 4–6, no. 21; Garbsch 1978, 49, pl. 6: 1 [no. B21]; Junkelmann 1996, 83–85, ill. 175–177, 184).

The second three-part chanfron (no. B22) is even more interesting for the context of stretched hides. The central, octagonal, profiled plate is decorated with the presentation of an armed Minerva in Corinthian helmet with plumed comb, the end of which protrudes over the forehead. The goddess is flanked by two writhing snakes. On both side plates, above the mesh-pattern eye covers (Ger. *Augenschutzkorb*), there is a presentation of Victoria and a lion (Ill. 28: b; Keim, Klumbach 1978 [1951], 30–31, pl. 33, 34: 1, 35: 1–2, no. 22; Garbsch 1978, 50, pl. 6: 2 [no. B22]). The shape of the central plate with exquisitely cut edges, with four symmetrical projections, references a stretched hide and its four “paws”. Here again a possible interpretation is that this is the hide of a predator.

Such an interpretation is further supported by another artefact of this type – specifically, a parade horse chanfron added to the collection of the Hungarian National Museum in Budapest in the autumn of 2021 (Mráv 2021). According to oral information, it had been excavated from the bottom of the Danube River at the town of Komárom (Szőny, Hungary) during dredging work²¹. One of the main Roman camps in Pannonia Superior, *Brigetio*, was once located nearby. It was garrisoned by one of the province's three Legions, the *legio I Adiutrix*, including one hundred and twenty cavalry (*equites legionis*). Not far from *Brigetio*, at *Odiavum* (today Almásfüzitő), another cavalry unit was stationed, specifically five hundred men of the *ala III Augusta Thracum*. Accord-

20 This hoard was accidentally discovered in 1950 during construction work on the grounds of a Roman villa located some 3 km to the west of the fort *Sorviodurum*. Most of the objects lay directly in the soil, covered from the top by an overturned bronze cauldron, discovered at some 40 cm depth. The arrangement leads to the theory that the cauldron had been filled with the goods and then dumped face-down into a hole in the ground. The haste of action, visible in the arrangement of the objects, points to the appearance of some sudden threat. Judging by other finds from along the *limes*, this could have been the Alemanni invasion of 233 AD, but the next such event from 259/60 AD cannot be excluded (Garbsch 1978, 47–51).

21 The artefact was purchased from the heir of an antiquarian, who half a century ago had been gifted this object by an acquaintance, an operator of an excavator/dredge employed in river deepening works (Mráv 2021).

ing to Zsolt Mráv the owner of the chanfron, unless travelling by boat, may had been a soldier stationed either at *Brigetio* or at the nearby cavalry camp. We do not know, however, where the chanfron had been made (Mráv 2021).



Ill. 28. chanfrons no. B21 (a) and no. B22 (b) from the deposit at Straubing, Germany (https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/3/3d/GBM_R%C3%B6merschatz_-_Rosstirn_7.jpg, accessed on: 9.12.2021)



Ill. 29. a – reconstruction of headstall with chanfron no. B21 from Straubing, Germany; b – knee cover from greave from *Carnuntum*, Austria (Junkelmann 1996, 83, ill. 176; 77, ill. 157–158)

The fully preserved three-part chanfron made from bronze sheet with mesh eye covers is richly decorated with embossed and engraved figural presentations. The central, octagonal plate with incised edges bears the full frontal image of naked Mars, partly wrapped in a cloak. The head of the deity is turned right and is covered by a helmet; Mars is holding a spear in his right hand and an oval shield in his left. On the side plates, above the mesh eye covers, we have eagles with beaks

facing outward, integrated into their top arches. The birds are shown in profile and standing on a globe. Eagles thus depicted are considered to be attributes of Jupiter (Ill. 30: a; Mráv 2021). In the context of our analysis one should note the shape of the central plate, even more explicitly associated with stretched hides than the chanfron no. B22 from Straubing (Ill. 30: b), the four deepest incisions in the edges of the plate probably imitate the marks left in the hide after the legs had been cut off – this interpretation may be used for similar incisions in the centre part of the palmetto fitting from Nidajno (see Ill. 24: c).



Ill. 30. Horse chanfron found in Danube near Komárom, Hungary (a), and its central piece with image of Mars (b; Mráv 2021, ill. 2)

Three-part chanfrons from bronze plates connected with hinges emerged in the 2nd century and were used chiefly during the 3rd century AD (type C acc. Nicolay [2007, 47])²². Such armour was manufactured in three sizes. The largest examples (40–45 cm height) provided effective protection to the front and sides of the horse's head, while medium and small ones chiefly protected the eyes. Regardless of size, the central plate – and the side plates in large and medium examples – were lavishly decorated with repousse, partly filled with perforated and engraved decorations (Garbsch 1978, 13–14; Nicolay 2007, 47).

The majority of horse head covers made from leather or copper alloys were discovered in Great Britain and in south Germany. The best known are those from the deposit at Straubing (*Sorviodurum*) and from Eining in Bavaria. Large metal chanfrons type C are dated to the 2nd–3rd cen-

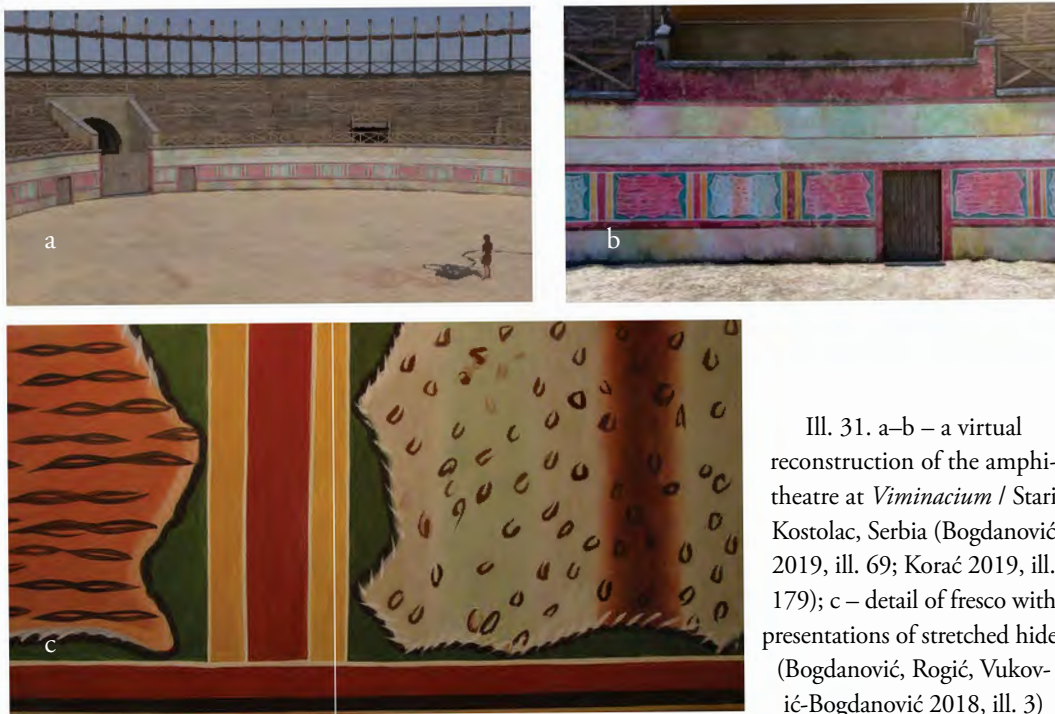
²² The prevailing view is that the oldest chanfrons were made from leather (type A acc. Nicolay). A leather parade chanfron decorated with embossed floral ornament highlighted with bronze rivets and with rows of dotted circles stamped onto the leather comes from Newstead in Great Britain. These are placed along the edges of the openings for eyes, originally probably covered with perforated bronze sheet. The central element of the chanfrons is decorated with a transverse motif of a votive plaque: *tabula ansata*. The artefact is dated to the 1st – early 2nd centuries AD (Garbsch 1978, 86; Junkelmann 1996, 92–93; Nicolay 2007, 46–47, ill. 2.21; Schuckelt 2014, 56).

turies AD in a strictly Roman and military context, mostly along the Rhine and upper Danube, although the earliest examples come from Tell Oum Hauran in Syria and Alba Iulia in Romania. The most expensive and exquisite examples come from Straubing, close to the garrison of the *cohors I Canathenorum Militaria Sagittariorum*, a unit initially formed as *auxilia* of Syrian archers from Canatha (to the south of Damascus; Spaul 2000). The Straubing and Eining deposits included elements of parade armour and barding, probably from *auxilia* units (Spaul 2000, 427). The general view is that the lavishly decorated examples comprised a portion of armour sets worn for parades or religious rites, not in combat, although the less showy examples might have been taken into battle (Garbsch 1978; Junkelmann 1996, 79; Schuckelt 2014). Hence the elements of horse chanfrons from Straubing and from the Danube were intentionally given the shape of stretched hides, probably performing an apotropaic function.

The motif of a stretched hide also appears in “military-related” context, yet still closely related with Roman settlement and the functioning of Roman military centres, i.e., with amphitheatres staging gladiatorial fights. The wooden amphitheatre at *Viminacium* (Stari Kostolac, Serbia) was raised to the northeast of the camp of the *legio VII Claudia* in the early 2nd century AD. At the close of that century it was replaced by a wood and stone construction. It belonged to a type typical of military buildings raised alongside forts in Roman provinces. Over time the amphitheatre was transformed into a civilian building, making part of a fortified town, and was used until the middle of the 4th century. The unique decoration painted on the walls of the arena is of particular relevance for our study. A band of panels, framed with differently coloured stripes, encircled the arena. The panels served as backdrop for schematically depicted stretched panther and tiger hides, placed alternatively, and separated by a painted framing (Ill. 31). So far this is the single recorded instance of such presentations, and thus it is unknown from any other Roman amphitheatre. Maybe there was some sort of hinted relationship with trophies won in fights with exotic animals, imported from afar (Bogdanović, Rogić, Vuković-Bogdanović 2018, 46, ill. 3; Bogdanović 2019; Korać 2019). The painted imitations of hides of wild felines on the walls of the arena probably was to convey a message of opulence (Рогић 2014, 148–154, ill. 5, 9, 10, 11, 12).

Gladiatorial fights (*munera gladiatoria*) played a very important role in the life of the Roman Empire’s population. We have many images of contestants and their equipment placed on objects from many various materials. In the context of gladiatorial combats and the presence of presentations of hides at the aforementioned amphitheatre, one may mention an interesting artefact – namely, a flat ceramic tile (7.6 × 11 × 1.4 cm) discovered at the Selište site near Kostolac in Serbia, close to the legionary camp at *Viminacium*. It stands out by its characteristic shape: the lower edge is straight, with the top and side edges being profiled into five “stretched” horns, separated with C-shaped indentations. The profiled obverse is decorated with an impressed presentation of a clash of two gladiators. The Thracian on the left attacks his opponent with a curved sword – a *sicca*, held in a gauntleted hand. His opponent, a *murmillio*, has a similar helmet with visor and

fighters with a short sword. Both are equipped shields, have straps crossed at the chest and wear pleated aprons (Ill. 32; Vujović 2011a, 259–260, pl. V: 2a–b). The accompanying inscription, which may be deciphered as MA and VRSI or VRSA, probably bears abbreviated names of the depicted fighters (Gavrilović 2011).



Ill. 31. a–b – a virtual reconstruction of the amphitheatre at *Viminacium* / Stari Kostolac, Serbia (Bogdanović 2019, ill. 69; Korać 2019, ill. 179); c – detail of fresco with presentations of stretched hides (Bogdanović, Rogić, Vuković-Bogdanović 2018, ill. 3)



Ill. 32. Ceramic tile showing fighting gladiators from *Viminacium* / Stari Kostolac, Serbia (Vujović 2011b, 200, ill. 1)

It is not exactly clear what was the intended use of the Selište tile. Similar objects with concave illustrations are considered to have been moulds for making the wax prototype for later mass production of metal specimens. Forms with relief showing scenes from the theatre, arena, or circus are also identified as forms for making cookies to be served with spiced wine with honey (*crustulum et mulsum*). Such public handouts of food or feasts (*epula publica*) accompanied the celebrations of jubilees and anniversaries, emperors' birthdays, the launch of major construction projects, as well as festivities (*ludi, munera*). In the opinion of other scholars, such forms were used to manufacture votums in the form of wax or lead figurines – or tiles/plaques – offered at shrines by actors, gladiators, and charioteers. Although the find from the settlement near *Viminacium* differs in shape from ordinary ceramic medallions (with their characteristic round shape) and was used to make *crustulum*, it probably had a similar votive function²³.

In my opinion the shape of the ceramic tile from Selište evidently draws upon that of stretched hides. Such an interpretation appears justified in the context of the presentations decorating the amphitheatre, directly associated with the gladiatorial fight on the plaque²⁴.

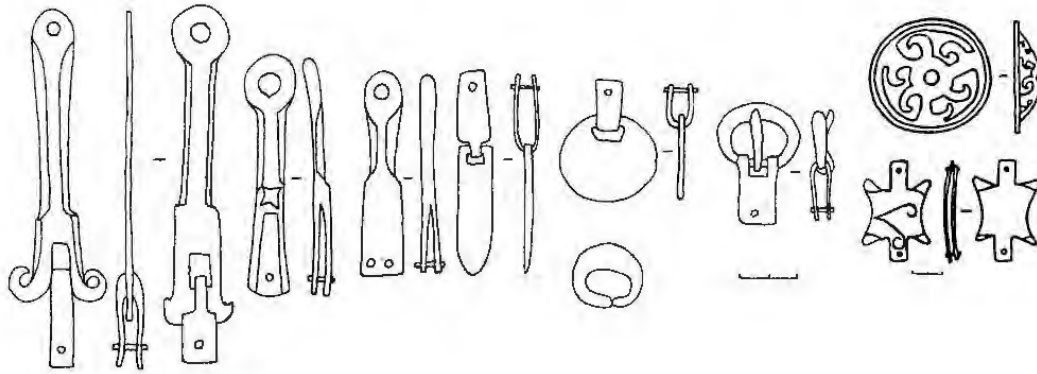
The motif of a stretched hide also appears in a non-Roman military context – specifically, among the Sarmatians. A fitting of such shape makes part of a lavish assemblage of silver elements of a horse bridle from barrow no. 2 at Kotluban, Volgograd Oblast, Russia (Ill. 33) alongside an imported colander, a grip of a bronze vessel, two knives, and a wooden bowl. The leather strap fitting cut from silver sheet is marked with a tamga. The burial is dated to between the end of the 2nd and middle of the 3rd centuries. The silver fittings and elements of bridle are made in the so-called faceted style typical of the parade equipment of Late Sarmatian warriors (Скрипкин 1989, ill. 1: 2–14).

Alongside elements of dress and jewellery, finds of sets of silver belt fittings and horse harnesses in Late Sarmatian assemblages are considered to be quite precise chronology indicators. Sets of faceted silver belt fittings from group IIa acc. Malashev (Малашев 2000, 199–200), as well as silver elements of horse tack appear in the 1st half of the 3rd century AD chiefly along the lower Don and the Volga Steppes, in burials of warriors with intentionally deformed skulls, probably of North Caucasian origin, later to become markers of prestige and high social status among Sarmatians from the Don-Volga steppes. Late Sarmatian burials with elements of armament and horse equipment from the middle of the 3rd century, recorded from the Danube to the Ural River, are interpreted as illustrating the expansion of the Sarmatian expansion of Alans from the Caucasus. It is likely that these objects could had been made at North Caucasian artisan centres, although

23 Most such medallions are of uniform size (11–12 cm), a profiled edge and concave figural presentations. Such items were especially popular along the Danube.

24 To date *Viminacium* is the only location in Serbia with an archaeologically attested amphitheatre, in use during the height of Moesia Superior's economic development. The events there were organized along similar lines as those in neighbouring areas of the Balkans (Vujović 2011a, 259–260, pl. V: 2a–b; 2011b; Gavrilović 2011).

manufacture at Bosporan workshops cannot be ruled out, e.g., at *Tanais* (Кривошеев 2007, 69–70; 2013, 132–134). It is possible that the stretched hide form of the fitting from Kotluban – besides serving as decoration – also had an apotropaic function, or had some sort of other symbolic meaning for the local nomads.



Ill. 33. Silver fittings of horse harnesses from Kotluban V, Volgograd Oblast, Russia, barrow no. 2, mid-3rd century AD. On the right a stretched hide fitting, decorated with a tamga (Кривошеев 2013, 133, ill. 1: A)

As shown by the above examples, elements of personal equipment and horse harnesses in the shape of hexagonal or stretched hide shields (some more, some less schematic) appear in a similar time horizon, chiefly in the middle of the 3rd century. However, the roots of such presentations run deeper still, doubtlessly reaching into an older world of symbols.

Symbolism of shields and animal hides

During the expansion of the Roman Empire the Roman military had a great demand for hides. These were used to manufacture various items and equipment, including headgear, armour, saddles, bags, weapons, shield covers and other combat accessories – at times even tents. Such finds come from *Vindonissa* in Switzerland as well as Cologne and Mainz in Germany. The hides were mostly from oxen, calves, sheep, and goats. It appears that predator fur and skins, including exotic ones (i.e., from lions, leopards, tigers) were luxury goods used as status symbols and as marks of bravery (e.g., such were worn by signifiers; Grömer, Russ-Popa, Saliari 2017, 81–82).

In the search for answers as to the ritual and symbolical use of shields, as well as the manners in which Central European communities of the Roman Period used them in ritualized behaviour, it may be useful to draw upon certain ethnographic and historical analogies from Celtic, Anglo-Saxon, and Norse cultures in the Early Middle Ages. Besides protection, shields served to identify

the members of a host, family, or clan, as well as to highlight an individual's high social standing, power, and prestige. The shield which in combat protected the user and his comrades, could also be an object providing symbolical security²⁵. It performed an apotropaic role in funeral rites, warding off evil even after the user's death²⁶ (Andrzejowski 2000, 23–42; Czarnecka 2012, 97–98, 104–105; 2014, 41–43; 2021; Czarnecka, Kontny 2009, 29–35; Kontny 2008; 2018; Raczyńska-Kruk, Kruk 2018, 108–122). The special importance of shields as a powerful or prestigious object in Germanic martial rituals is well attested with archaeological finds from the European *Barbaricum* (Speidel 2002, 265, 275).

Most cultures used animal hides in some ritualistic manner (Andrzejowski 2000, 32, 37; see Eliade 2011; Słupecki 2011; 2014; Duczko 2016). In Celtic beliefs and customs animals were assigned a protective role – for example, before combat Briton warriors donned hides of totemic animals. Shamanistic practices, such as “becoming an animal” and taking on its strength when in battle frenzy, were also widespread among Germanic warrior and made up a part of their war magic (Raczyńska-Kruk, Kruk 2018, 124; further reading there). Thus a shield shaped like a stretched hide held similar symbolic meaning as the hide itself. For it also could be associated with the archetype of animalistic strength and vitality.

A similar symbolism of animal hides is found in more distant cultures, as well. One interesting analogy is the shield used during the ceremonial Intore dance of elite Tutsi warriors from Rwanda. The dance is rooted in martial tradition and combines elements of mock combat with rhythm and music. The dancers present the heroic epic during the Kuvuga Amacumu ceremony – literally, “the tale of spears”. Intore shields are decorated with traditional motifs, including a pattern quite similar to those seen on Roman fittings and harness pendants (Ill. 34, 35).



Ill. 34. Tutsi-Intore warrior with shield used in ceremonial dance (Photo M. Schwartz, <https://amuraworld.com/topics/history-art-and-culture/articles/7069-arte-y-tradiciones-port-la-paz>, accessed on: 10.12.2020)

25 The persistence of such belief is visible in the Polish tradition of gifting miniature gorgets at christenings, rooted in later traditions of chivalry.

26 It may be presumed that extra-military uses of Barbarian shields are associated with certain symbolical aspects of their use in Roman culture and in the culture of Antiquity in general (Kontny 2008, 107; Raczyńska-Kruk, Kruk 2018, 110, 115–116).



Ill. 35. a – Tutsi-Intore dance with ceremonial shields (Photo B. Kinney, http://barbarakinney.com/blog/?attachment_id=883, accessed: 10.12.2020); b – a Tutsi-Intore with shield, draped with fabric imitating traditional animal skins (Photo F. Schertzer, https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/f/fa/Intore_4.jpg, accessed on: 10.12.2020)

Solid comparative material is provided by the large traditional Tuareg shields made from antelope hide – the *aghar*. These partly preserve the shape of a stretched hide, further accentuated by the shape of metal fittings (Ill. 36: a–c). Such a motif is also apparent in Tuareg protective amulets, the *tcherot / tereout*, made from leather decorated with metal fittings or from metal (Ill. 36: f). Some possess an identical shape to that of Roman fittings – the element of military equipment classified as variant B8 acc. Nicolay (2007, pl. 74: B8) – and to the Przeworsk Culture amulets shaped like miniature shields.

The examples cited above, although referencing diverse cultural phenomena from different periods, are nevertheless clearly connected. The shape of the shield is repeated as it preserves the form of the material it was made from, i.e., an animal hide. Even after the use of shields was abandoned, their shape, due to their apotropaic symbology, was reproduced in the form of fittings and pendants that also served as protective amulets – or were worn for “good luck”, not necessarily in a military context.

Painted and decorated hides of bison and other hoofed animals also constitute a very important element of the material and spiritual heritage of North American natives (Ill. 37: b–f). Another example of the use the stretched animal hide motif, in this case highly stylized and geometric, is one of the most iconic traditional patterns on carpets woven today by the Turkic Afshar semi-nomads. This ethnic group has its roots in Central Asia, but today lives around the city of Kerman in south-eastern Iran, having been resettled there from the north-west of the country. Their carpets, known as Afshar or Sirdjan, usually feature geometric motifs, the most popular being the centrally placed stretched and ready for working animal hide (Ill. 38; Oberling 1984).



Ill. 36. Traditional Tuareg shields from antelope hide: a – shield from Niger (Photo T. Hamill, <https://www.hamillgallery.com/TUAREG/TuaregShields/TuaregShield01.html>, accessed on: 9.12.2021); b – Arar shield, Hoggar region, Algeria, before 1930 AD (<https://www.gazette-drouot.com/lots/3709119>, accessed on: 9.12.2021); c – shield (Musée d’ethnographie de Neuchâtel, no. 60.7.317, <https://africa.si.edu/exhibits/tuareg/contact.html>, accessed on: 9.12.2021); d–e – a woman’s veil brass weight with apotropaic shield motif, Mali (<https://virtual-artifacts.tumblr.com/post/99982533100/veil-weights-tuareg-peoples-of-mali-1-2-veil>, accessed on: 9.12.2021); f – *tcherot* amulette from leather with metal fittings, Mauritania (<https://www.etsy.com/pl/listing/510662111>, accessed on: 9.12.2021)



Ill. 37. a – the negative of the hide presentation on the palmetto fitting from Nidajno (no. 8; Photo M. Bogacki); b – hide, Arapaho Indians, c. 1875 (The Metropolitan Museum of Art., <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/751497>, accessed on: 9.12.2021); c – painted hide, Rosebud County, Montana, USA, c. 1927 (Ewers 1939); d – hide, Arapaho Indians, c. 1880 (The Portland Art. Museum, <http://www.portlandartmuseum.us/mwebcgi/mweb.exe?request=record;id=26524;type=101>, accessed on: 9.12.2021); e – hide, Arapaho Indians, c. 1899 (https://anthro.amnh.org/anthropology/databases/common/image_dup.cfm?catno=50+%2F++101, accessed on: 9.12.2021); f – hide, Comanche Indians, mid 19th century (Timothy S. Y. Lam Museum of Anthropology, <https://lammuseum.pastperfectonline.com/webobject/63E3680C-325D-435C-B3C3-731967820683>, accessed on: 9.12.2021)

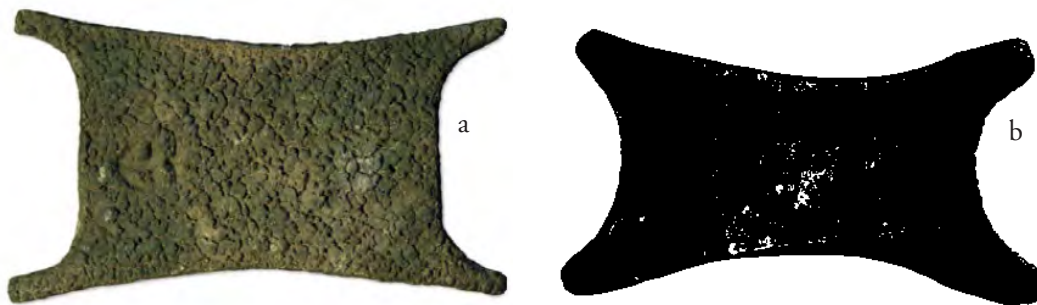


Ill. 38. Afshar type carpet decorated with geometric motif of stretched animal hide (<https://www.carpetencyclopedia.com/styles-origin/persian-carpets/afshar>; <https://www.carpet-wiki.com/persian-rugs/afshar/>; <https://pl.pinterest.com/pin/175358979231391449/>, accessed on: 9.12.2021)

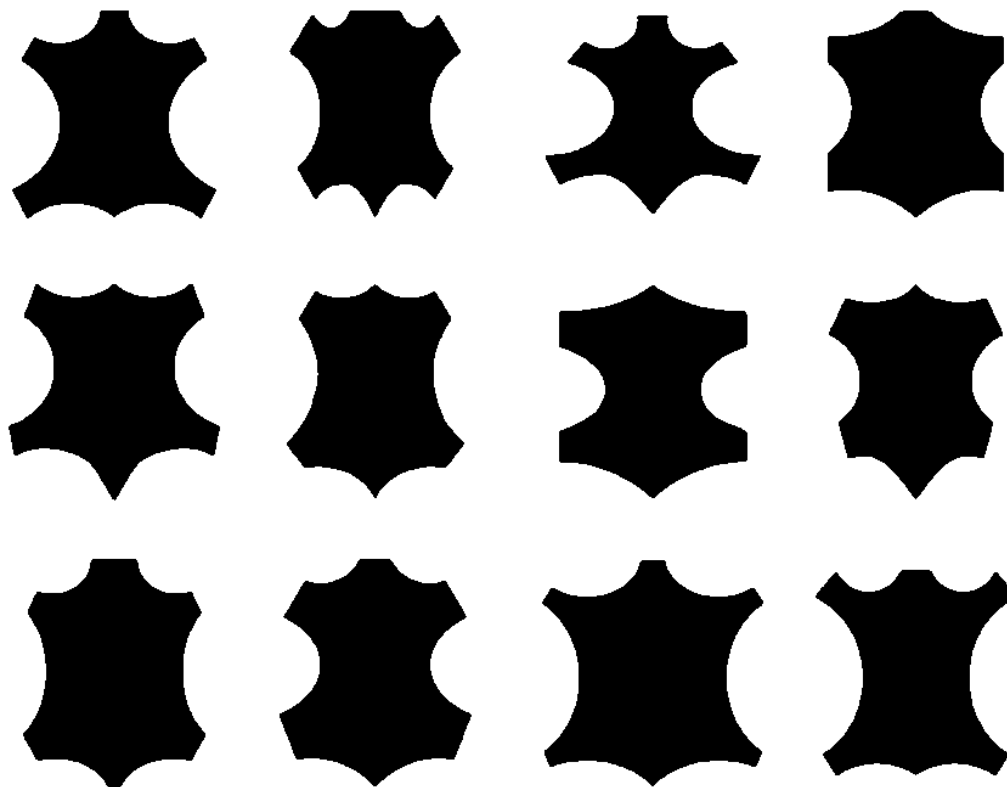
A reference to stretched hides is included in the contemporary archaeological term – ox-hide *ingots*. This is the name used for heavy ingots manufactured in the Later Bronze Age in the Mediterranean Sea basin. Cast from copper or tin, the ingots were shaped like rectangles with inward-curved sides and more or less pronounced “horns” (Ill. 39: a; see Papasavvas 2009; further reading there). In parallel to the ingots, their miniature versions also circulated, these being made from bronze by the lost wax method and interpreted as votums (Ill. 39: b; see Papasavvas 2009; Giumlía-Mair, Kassianidou, Papasavvas 2011). The first researchers to discover these objects gave them the name *ox-hide* due to their similarity to such hides. Although no direct link has been proven – the shape of the ingots is most probably due to ergonomics²⁷ – the term became ingrained in archaeological literature (Bass 1967, 69; Papasavvas 2009).

Today we may observe the reduction of the stretched hide motif to a trademark (a characteristic feature of consumer society) – namely, the symbol used to denote articles made from genuine and not faux leather (Ill. 40).

²⁷ The “horns” or “arms” doubtlessly made the handling of the ingots easier, as these typically were over 30 kilograms in weight (Bass 1967, 69; Papasavvas 2009).



Ill. 39. a – ox-hide ingot c. 70.5 cm long and 41.5 cm wide from Enkomi, Cyprus (© The Trustees of the British Museum, https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/G_1897-0401-1535, accessed on: 30.08.2021); b – miniature ox-hide ingot from Dikaios near Enkomi, Cyprus (Papasavvas 2009, 125, ill. 21)



Ill. 40. Contemporary symbols used by the leather industry to mark articles made from genuine leather (edit A. Rzeszotarska-Nowakiewicz)

Motif of equine-human hybrid

A unique presentation on the palmetto fitting from Nidajno is the equine-human hybrid (Ill. 41). The creature is formed from three elements – a human head shown in profile, facing left, a horse head “growing” out of it, also facing left, and finally two long, unshapely legs emerging downward from the “neck” and ending in taloned feet. The human and equine eyes were made with the same punch (a small circle inside a large one), and the horse ears and nostrils were given an almond shape with the same stamps as used for other zoomorphic presentations found on other Nidajno fittings (Ill. 9). This motif had not previously been noted on belt and horse harness fittings, yet it is far from unknown in Ancient art – hence a different category of finds will be used for its analysis.

The classic *Gryllos*

The equine-human hybrid is evidently associated with the classic *imaginarium* of Antiquity, specifically the forms called *grylloi* (Ill. 41).

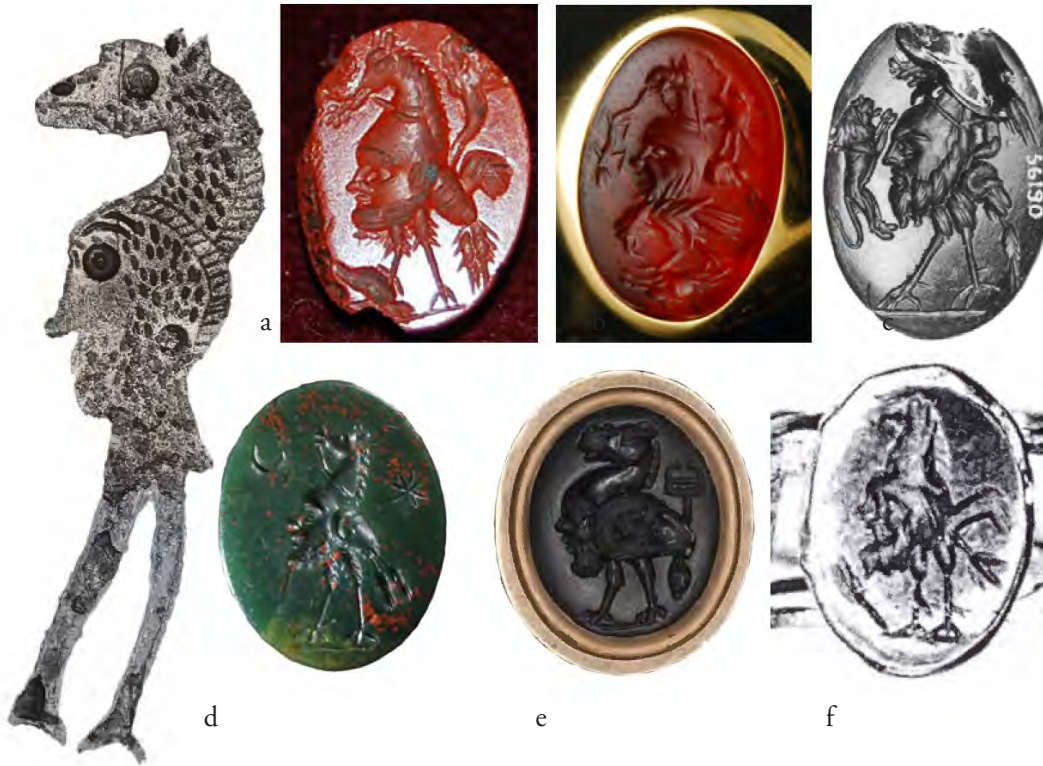
The Greek term *gryllos* (plural – *grylloi* / *grilli*; Lat. *gryllus*, plural *grylli*) is universally used in gemmology-related literature in relation to Hellenistic and Roman intaglio, i.e., gemmae from precious or semi-precious stones, with surfaces decorated with sunk relief presenting grotesque and fantastical creatures²⁸. Usually its origin is attributed to Pliny the Elder – specifically, to his description of a grotesque creature painted in the 4th century BC by Antiphilus of Alexandria. The creature is probably human, yet with an equine head and in strange clothing (*Historia Naturalis* XXXV, 37, [114f.]), and is considered to be some sort of caricature (Binsfeld 1956, *Grylloi*; Gesztelyi 1992; Hammerstaedt 2000, 29–40; Lapatin 2011, 90; Śliwa 2012)²⁹.

Other cited inspirations for *grylloi*-type presentations are their presentations in the glyptic art of the Eastern Zone (Achaemenid, Carthaginian, Sardinian) and in Late Archaic Eastern Greek glyptic art (Lapatin 2011, 89; further reading there). A typical *grylloi* presentation – e.g., a human head on bird legs “sprouting” from an equine head – may possibly illustrate the fantastical bird known from comedies by Aristophanes (“The Frogs”, “Peace”, and “The Birds”) and Aeschylus (“Myrmidons”), called *hippaelectrion*. Such fantastical creatures also appear on Greek vases and in

28 These *grylloi* did not, however, possess a defining legend and a definitely fixed shape, in contrast to such fixtures of the *imaginarium* of Antiquity as centaurs, silenes, minotaurs, gryphons, pegasi, and chimeras.

29 Until the 18th century the term *gryllos* was used in the context of caricatures and Antique literature, and not for presentations of hybrids on Ancient gemmae, for which various terms were in use. The first scholars to use this word for presentations on gemmae were Antonio F. Gori (1750) and Johann J. Winckelmann (1760, alternatively with the word “chimera”; Lapatin 2011, 91–93; Śliwa 2012).

Hellenistic and Roman decorative art. Such strongly rooted traditional motifs were adopted by the Romans from the Greeks (Lapatin 2011, 89–90)³⁰.



Ill. 41. Roman gemmae with *grylloi* dated to the 2–3rd centuries AD: a–d – gemmae from British Museum (© The Trustees of the British Museum; https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/G_1987-0212-418, https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/H_OA-9679, accessed on: 24.07.2019); d – gemma (<https://auctions.bertolamifinearts.com/en/lot/34375/roman-heliotrope-intaglio-gryllos-the-/>, accessed on: 22.07.2020); f – gold ring with gemma from Adony, Hungary (Gesztelyi 2000, 157, no. 250)

Various types of hybrids are grouped under the term *grylloi*, ranging from relatively simple to more complex forms³¹. The simplest are constituted by at least two heads (human, animal, or human and animal – usually anthropomorphic presentations of *silenes* or *satires* or so-called masks,

30 For broad coverage of interpreting Pliny the Elder and other Ancient sources (and later subject matter literature) in this context see Lapatin 2011; Śliwa 2012.

31 As noted by Ken Lapatin, there is no single precise and binding definition of *grylloi* known from gemmae. In his opinion a better term for such presentations would be “*hybrids, fantastic mixtures, animal aggregates, polycephalous monsters, theriomorphic symplegmata, mask-animal gems, auspicious and ludic motifs, composites*”; Lapatin 2011, 88). According to Joachim Śliwa, in regard to gems the more widely terms are *mask-animal gems* and *Gemmen mit Tier-Masken (Maske-Tier-Kombination)*, while French continues to use *grylles* and *figures grotesques* (Śliwa 2012, 380).

i.e., faces devoid of attributes shown in profile, combined with presentations of eagles, cocks, peacocks, ibis, horses, wild boars, goats, snakes, dolphins, dogs, and elephants). More complex arrangements include additional elements, e.g., wreathes, corn wreathes, garlands, cornucopia, caduceus, thyrsus etc. (Lapatin 2011, 89). Ken Lapatin considers the anecdote quoted by Pliny the Elder, the origin of the term *gryllos* (*Historia Naturalis* XXXV, 37, [114f.]), to be an example of an erroneous use of a text as an interpretation key. In his view the ancient term *gryllos* is not applicable to the above described presentations in the decorative arts, as it skips over their defining feature – i.e., hybridization. Hence the key to their interpretation should be aspects such as the bizarre, the grotesque, the bending of the laws of nature and of the natural world order, aspects criticized by Ancient *literati* and aesthetes, yet of greatest value to their makers and buyers, as these upheld metamorphosis, provocation, and instability. In such light the intentional complexity and mysteriousness of such imagery, involving the viewer and eluding easy and straightforward interpretation, was intended to be the source of their power, drawn from the supernatural world (Lapatin 2011, 93–96; Weiss 2017); possibly an expression of the horror caused by the overturning of the natural order and the adoption of a grotesque shape.

According to Carina Weiss, who presented a different suggestion on how to understand the term *grylloi*, the previous lack of precise definition and proper understanding of this term by many scholars led to its expansion – from a quite narrow and concise category of ancient presentations with specific semantic context – to a heterogeneous group of hybrid animals and items combined with the motif of human head or mask, known from intaglio and gemmae (Weiss 2017, 145; see Binsfeld 1956; Gesztelyi 1992; Hammerstaedt 2000, 29–40; Lapatin 2011, 88, 90; Śliwa 2012). In her view the term *grylloi* should be used solely in regard to a sub-category of presentations (found mostly on gemmae dated from the 2nd–1st centuries BC onward) of small, ‘desiccated’ personifications of not quite human, somewhat insectoid characters performing human tasks. Occasionally these could be e.g., mice or other small animals leading *bigae* or dragging prey several times larger than themselves. Such presentations of an “inverted” world, of an overturned *status quo*, where the weak become strong, where e.g., dwarfs, insectoid characters, or small animals perform “human” tasks and dominate over their natural adversaries (Weiss 2017, 149–150)³².

Weiss suggests we analyze a broader group of presentations on gemmae, such as combinations of masks/faces and animal elements, e.g., small roosters, horses, and similar hybrids, in a different context. She considers the presentations of combined heads of humans and e.g., horses or rams, Silene’s mask, rooster legs and tail, wreath and palm (elements associated with Mercury) to represent luck and victory in horse races, or more broadly – in love or life in general. Weiss, just as

³² In this context Weiss calls upon the opinion of Jürgen Hammerstaedt, that the term *grylloi* probably became “detached” from its original source, i.e., a specific character on an Antiphilus painting, and came to be used in the context of certain grotesque/incongruous presentations repeated in the decorative arts. The incongruity stemmed from small size, disproportional build, deformities, and ugliness (Hammerstaedt 2000, 33–34).

Erika Zwierlein-Diehl, considers such hybrids to be “good luck charms” intended to bring fortune and victories in sport competitions, and often also serving an apotropaic function – protection from the “evil eye” and curses (Zwierlein-Diehl 1986, 274 and subsequent, 839–840; 2007, 142; Weiss 2017, 151)³³.

The peak of the popularity of classic *grylloi* – or, in Weiss’s take on the matter, *baskanion* presentations – in the Roman Empire was the 3rd century (Lapatin 2011; further reading there).

***Grylloi* as a decorative motif of parade equipment**

Grylloi were identified as an element of iconography on unique artefacts discovered in several opulent burials, i.e., so-called princely graves. At Osztrópataka-Ostrovany in Slovakia, in burial 2, gilded silver sheets with repousse were discovered, probably elements of saddle-pommel fittings. One fitting bears a classic image of a *gryllos*, likely made by impression with a gemma type I acc. Pröttel (1991)³⁴ (Ill. 42), although the fitting was probably made in a Barbarian workshop. The burial is dated from the middle to late 3rd century (Prohászka 2006, 73–78, ill. 66–67, 70, pl. 3–4; Paul 2011, 280–320; Przybyła 2018, 542).

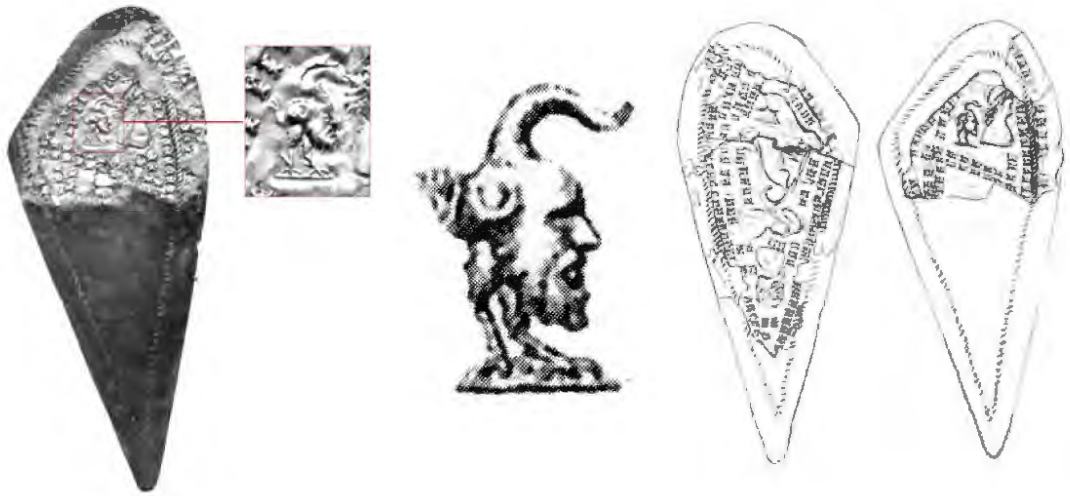
Another example are fittings, also made from repousse sheet, decorating a shield boss from a lavish barrow burial discovered in the Herpály steppe in Hungary in 1849 (Ill. 43: b–d). The burial included the warrior and his mount, the equipment encompassing the shield, spear and “a gold item resembling a buckle”. Today only the boss survives, classified as *Stangenschildbuckel* (Fettich 1930, 221–228, ill. 1, pl. 11–14; Nagy 2007; Masek 2018).

The facings of the Herpály boss were made from silver sheet coated with a thick layer of gold. The ornament is divided into four parts by narrow reinforcing slats; the presentations on the four fields are repetitive. The exquisitely crafted ornament was made with metal matrices, as indicated by the sharp contours of the impressions (Nagy 2007; Masek 2018, 216, ill. 360–363)³⁵.

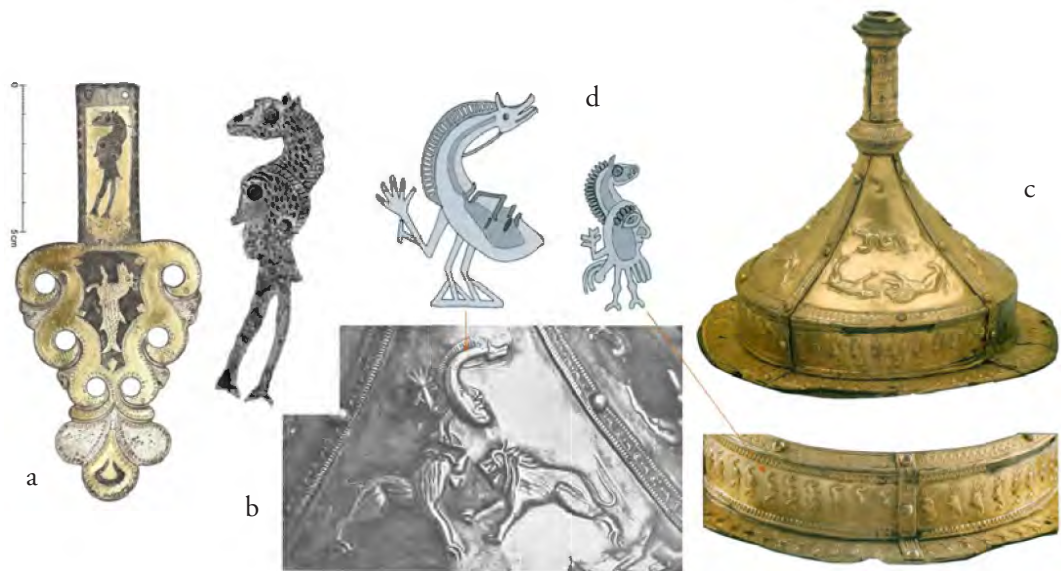
33 For such presentations to date termed *grylloi*, the scholar suggests *baskania* (from Greek *baskanion* – a humanoid figure which is to be terrifying, yet at the same time cause laughter; Weiss 2017, 150–152). Thus for Weiss *grylloi* are a sub-category inside the broader category of *baskania*, grouping presentations inside a narrow semantic context (see above), its connection to the rest of the category chiefly being through its apotropaic function (Weiss 2017, 153). In archaeological literature the term *gryllos* denotes a human-animal hybrid (human head/mask combined with animal head or heads, and set atop bird legs), i.e., with the meaning preceding Weiss’s proposal. Being aware of the discussion on the issue among gemmologists, I stick to the latter definition of *gryllos* as it prevails among archaeologists of the *Barbaricum*.

34 Motif B9 (*gryllus*) in the classification of anthropomorphic motifs on stamped metal sheets according to Przybyła (2018, 25).

35 Joachim Werner considered the model of the press used to make the *grylloi* on the Herpály boss to have been “evidently Roman”, whereas Andreas Alföldi deemed the stamp to have prepared by a Barbarian artisan imitating Roman patterns. Additionally Alföldi also was of the mind, that the presentations of *grylloi* from Herpály and Osztrópataka-Ostrovany may have had a link to Late Roman-Oriental religious mysteries. The second fantastical creature from the animalistic scenes on the boss – a creature



Ill. 42. Osztrópataka-Ostrovany, Slovakia, burial 2, gilded silver saddle pommel facings; detail with *gryllos* (Prohászka 2006, ill. 67, pl. 4)



Ill. 43. *Gryllos* motif: a – fitting from Nidajno no. 8 (Photo M. Osiadacz); b–d – facings of parade shield boss from a “princely” burial at Herpály, Hungary (Fettich 1930, pl. XIV [b]; Nagy 2007, pl. 8: 1–2 [c–d])

with the head of a bird of prey and the body of a sea lion – in his opinion was copied from the relief decoration of a Roman silver vessel (Alföldi 1934, 115–116; Nagy 2007, 75).

The decoration of the boss includes figural scenes, such as animals fighting and depictions of mythological creatures. In a chequerboard arrangement the opposing fields present a lion, a wild boar, and – underneath – a fantastical sea animal. The next two fields present a pair of lions³⁶ and (above them) an anthropomorphic *gryllos*-type hybrid. Yet the composition arrangement is now different – the lion, wild boar, and sea animal are shown in a different perspective than the pair of lions with the *gryllos*, meaning that regardless of the boss's orientation, some part of the ornament will be turned 180° (Nagy 2007, 139, pl. 6: 1–2, 7: 1–2).

The Herpály boss bears two variants of highly stylized *grylloi*, ones combined with zoomorphic presentations or with geometric patterns (Ill. 43: b–d). An example of the first is the larger *gryllos* placed above the pair of lions, while of the second – the smaller *grylloi*, a row of which is used to form a frieze on two of the three fully preserved plaques surrounding the lower part of the boss's rim. The sheet with *grylloi* were arranged in different perspectives (similarly to the figural decorations of the facings), hence depending upon the boss's orientation eleven *grylloi* from one of the plaques will always be positioned with heads down (the third plaque is decorated with geometric patterns, and the fourth was not preserved; Fettich 1930, 221–228; Nagy 2007, 74, 139, pl. 5: 1a–1d).

The presentation of the larger *gryllos* includes a beardless male head, in profile and looking right. A strongly curved protome – in the form of maned horse head with bridle – is drawn from the line of the forehead. An arm bent at the elbow, with splayed fingers, touches the head. Slightly curved bird legs emerge from the head, ending with two or three talons marked with lines. According to Nándor Fettich (1930) the raised line between the forehead and chin suggests a helmet. In spite of the lack of a clear image, it cannot be ruled out that the zoomorphic protome of the helmet is a horse's head (Nagy 2007, 74, 139, pl. 5: 1b).

The very same template is repeated in the smaller *gryllos*. The two presentations do differ in details, though: the smaller *gryllos* preserves vestiges of a bird tail and projections on the chin (resembling a beard or a cock's wattle). Moreover, the bird legs end in two talons, while the horse head lacks a bridle (Nagy 2007, 139, pl. 5: 1a–1b, 8: 1–2).

The Herpály boss is part of a group of similar finds with Germanic features and belongs to type 3d acc. Ilkjær (Carnap-Bornheim, Ilkjær 1996a, 279–298). Bosses of this type from Scandinavian assemblages are dated to the close of phase C1b. In spite of the specifically Sarmatian local environment, the very presence of exceptionally decorated facings from silver and gold assign this burial to the category of Late Roman Period burials of warriors belonging to the social elite, even if the used ornamentation motifs do not possess analogies among Roman Period parade bosses from the Scandinavian context, such as Illerup, Denmark (four type 3d bosses), Vimose, Denmark (silver type 3 bosses; bronze type 3d bosses), Thorsberg, Germany (two silver type 3d bosses), Lilla Harg, Sweden (type 3b iron boss with silver, gilded sheet), Avaldsnes, Norway, burial

36 The animal on the left is also identified as a bear (Masek 2018, 216).

2 (silver type 3e boss) or Gommern, Germany (type 6c boss). Examples from Illerup, Vimose, and Thorsberg bog deposits and the Lilla Harg burial are dated to phase C1b, while the lavish warrior burial³⁷ 13 at Avaldsnes to phases C1b–C2. The latest burial in this line is the “princely” grave from Gommern from the last quarter of the 3rd century (Becker 2010, 347). Bosses of this type are not known from Roman castles or other military facilities. Among other pieces of a warrior’s prestigious personal equipment, parade shields with silver or golden trim were symbols of the highest status in Barbarian society and are ascribed to Barbarian princes or leaders of warbands from the Late Roman Period (Carnap-Bornheim, Ilkjær 1996a, 279–298; 1996b, 260–261; Becker 2010; Stylegar, Reiersen 2017, 604–607, 615–616).

The ethnicity of the deceased buried in inhumation graves equipped with *Stangenschildbuckel* type bosses is unknown. The cultural links of the man from the Herpály burial with the Sarmatian milieu are suggested by elements of the funeral rites, while the presence of the shield and the type of its boss in the equipment carry Germanic connotations (Fettich 1930; Istvánovits, Kulcsár 1994, 416)³⁸.

The Herpály boss had previously been dated to the 1st half or the middle of the 3rd century (Carnap-Bornheim, Ilkjær 1996a, 292, 298; Nagy 2007, 73–74). The current view is that a 2nd half of the 3rd century date is more likely, although an even later date cannot be dismissed, i.e., the early 4th century (Masek 2018, 216). The *gryllo* imagery on the Herpály boss, as well as on the silver, gilded fittings of the saddle pommel from Osztrópataka-Ostrovany, are interpreted as apotropaic elements commonly used in the 3rd century *Barbaricum* (Fettich 1930; Nagy 2007, 74; Masek 2018, 216–219).

Another *gryllos* presentation was found not in a military assemblage, but in an unquestionably female context. An identical repousse technique as to that used for the saddle-pommel fitting from Osztrópataka-Ostrovany or the facings of the Herpály boss, was employed in the crafting of gold sheet decorating the plaques of the legs of a pair of rosette/faceted *fibulae* from group 6 acc. Przybyła (2018, 105–112). The fibulae were found in a lavishly equipped female burial near Zhy-

37 A number of data suggest that tomb 2 from Avaldsnes was the tomb of a double: that of a male warrior and a female (Stylegar, Reiersen 2017, 615).

38 Funeral rites pointing towards Sarmatian cultural connotations are the barrow mound and the horse burial (Fettich 1930; Istvánovits, Kulcsár 1994, 416; Nagy 2007, 73). In the northern fringes of Sarmatian settlement there was a group aware of *Stangenschildbuckel* type bosses and whose funeral rites show strong Germanic influence (Masek 2018, 216). A boss of this type was discovered in the very same region, and also in a barrow, at Hortobágy-Poroshát, burial II.10 (Zoltai 1941, 288, pl. 8:2; Istvánovits, Kulcsár 1994, 416). This picture is rounded out by the equipment of the burial at Geszteréd, burial V.6, with a Roman sword in a scabbard with discoid foot and remaining equipment (boss, spurs, imitation of *terra sigillata*) from the Roman Empire. The burial is dated to the 1st half or middle of the 3rd century (Carnap-Bornheim 2001, ill. 2). It is likely that these three cemeteries from the upper Tisza River, close to the borders of Dacians and Germanians, was used by the same group of people, the core of which were Sarmatians maintaining close links with their Germanic neighbours and Roman *auxilia* (Istvánovits, Kulcsár 1994, 413–416, ill. 6).

tomyr in Ukraine (Бажан 2011; Ill. 44). Each sheet bears the motif of a face (motif B5 acc. Przybyła [2018, 25]) and two simplified *gryllo* presentations (motif no. B9 acc. Przybyła [2018, 25]).

Besides the pair of rosette *fibulae*, the burial contained numerous Roman coins from the turn of the 2nd and 3rd centuries and the middle of the 3rd century, a pair of gold earrings of Roman origin, a silver-wire necklace, a bronze chain, and bronze mirror. The cremation burial was placed in a bronze vase with handle attachments decorated with a mask (Ill. 44: j–k; Бажан 2011; Милашевский 2015, 235, ill. 5: II)³⁹. The chronology of the assemblage is best dated by the rosette *fibulae* dated in the areas occupied by Wielbark and Chernyakhov Cultures to phases C^{1b}–C₂ (from the mid 3rd to the turn of 3rd century). The five currently known examples – from Havor in Sweden, Slusegård in Denmark, Weklice, Elbląg District, Poland, and two fibulae from Lubieszewo, Nowy Dwór Gdański District, Poland – have their repousse gold sheet foils decorated with motif B5 acc. Przybyła, i.e., a human mask, similar to the *fibulae* from near Zhytomyr (Przybyła 2018, 111, ill. 3/92).

Another analogy for the *gryllos* presentation from Nidajno is a unique, solid, metal fashion accessory⁴⁰ – a barbarized image of a *gryllos* with ram and horse heads. Its details are highlighted with punches and engraving (Ill. 45: b). Different from the “bird legs” of *gryllo* impressed into sheet, here we see the “webbed” feet of this hybrid’s legs, characteristic for presentations of the Scythian and Sarmatian god Thagimasidas, whom Herodotus identified with the Greek Poseidon (Ill. 45: c; Гасанов 2002, 339–346; Гуляев 2006; see Herodotus, *Histories IV.59*)⁴¹. The motif of a ram’s head was very popular in Greek utilitarian art: jewellery, ceramic rhytons and *askoi*, and on Scythian rhytons, late Scythian ceramic stoves or late Sarmatian, decorated ceramic ram-shaped vases (Khrapunov 2011, ill. 15; 2012, ill. 17, 66). The hairstyle of the *gryllos* is marked in a manner similar to that of hair of the human face motif – B4 and B5 acc. Przybyła, as seen on impressed sheet (see Przybyła 2018, 25, 528–537). The manner of presentation using straight, parallel lines, with an emphasized line above the forehead, is typical of Germanic workshops.

This artefact belongs to the small group of exceptional presentations showing Barbarian – Germanic and Sarmatian – stylistic associations, yet ones evidently inspired by Greek and Roman *gryllo* imagery.

39 Sadly, the full composition of this assemblage is unknown – it was discovered as part of illegal explorations and is practically inaccessible for further research (Бажан 2011, 92).

40 The item was probably cast in bronze. The greyish colour may point to bronze with high lead content. Going by the description and photographs of the bottom section, the accessory was soldered to some sort of metal surface. Sadly, this is yet another find from Ukraine without a known archaeological context, the result of illegal exploration and therefore not available for further research (Артефакти України [Artifacts of Ukraine], <https://www.facebook.com/groups/1813007115390957>, accessed on: 9.12.2021).

41 The god of the Royal Scythians. Ethology of Thagimasidas: the one who commands the land and waters, herds of animals, casts seed and gathers the grain, father of horses (Гасанов 2002, 346).



Ill. 44. a-l – equipment of burial from near Zhytomyr, Ukraine; m – details of sheet with human mask motif and a pair of *grylloi* (Бажан 2011, 91–92)



Ill. 45. a – *gryllos* from fitting no. 8 from Nidajno (Photo M. Osiadacz); b – *gryllos* shaped accessory, loose find, Ukraine (Артефакти України [Artifacts of Ukraine], <https://www.facebook.com/groups/1813007115390957>, accessed on: 9.12.2021); c – gold fittings of Scythian quiver with depiction of Thagimasidas, 4th century BC., Soboleva Mohyla, Ukraine (Гуляев 2006, ill. 114)

The *gryllos* from Osztrópataka-Ostrovany is probably an impression made with an antique gemma, evidently of Classic style, while the presentations on the sheet from near Zhytomyr are extremely simplistic; the *grylloi* from the Herpály boss and the accessory from Ukraine are topped with a horse head, similarly to the palmetto fitting from Nidajno. The repetitive use of this element in the “equine” *gryllos* variant might point to some special connection with a military context (especially as the equine element in the Nidajno fitting is repeated by the *hippocampus*).

An element from the universe of Roman military cults that may be associated with *grylloi* presentations is that of votive statuettes of Mars and Jupiter wearing Corinthian helmets topped with a tall protome with elaborate plume, for in several presentations they resemble a horse’s head (Ill. 47: f–g; see Nagy 2007, 75). These Late Roman helmets do indeed often possess zoomorphic protome, although almost invariably in the form of an eagle’s head (e.g., parade helmets from Theilenhofen and Frankfurt-Heddernheim in Germany, Tell Oum Hauran in Syria, *Brigetio* in Hungary and from one unknown location; Garbsch 1978, pl. 10; 16: 2, 4; 28; 29).

Associations with headwear including a horse head protome are inspired by crowns of Sassanian rulers as depicted on coins struck by Bahram (Vahram) II (274–293). Depictions of his family members with such headwear were also used to decorate silver vessels (Ill. 46). Although there might have been some sort of link between these presentations and both Classic and Barbarized *grylloi* from the European zone (see Nowakiewicz, Rzeszotarska-Nowakiewicz 2012; further reading there), the probability of any initial inspiration of Sassanian traditions for the latter is very low.



Ill. 46. a–c – drachmas of Bahram (Vahram) II (274–293, mint at Ctesiphon, Mesopotamia); d – chalice with image of prince Bahram III from Sargveshi, Georgia, and its detail (Nowakiewicz, Rzeszotarska-Nowakiewicz 2012, ill. 77)

In this context an interesting question is the geographic range of *grylloi* presentations on Barbarian products limited to Central and Eastern Europe, including the eastern part of Germanic “princely” burials zone, and the areas of the Wielbark and Chernyakhov Cultures in the 2nd half of the 3rd century (Map 2). At present it is difficult to explain the reason for exactly such a distribution, although it is very illustrative of the penetration and adaptation of motifs from the Classic World into Barbarian art in this area.

The context of *grylloi* presentations on soldiers’ personal effects raises the question as to the nature of its connection with classic presentations of *grylloi*. Roman military camps along the European *limes* have yielded many finds of gemmae with varied imagery, *grylloi* included. Rings with gemmae were also worn by local civilians but, due to their popularity among soldiers (Gesztelyi 2000, 12–13), it is presumed that the high number of such finds is related with the presence of Roman military units. This applies to both the Pannonian and Rhine *limes*. Gemmae had been discovered at e.g., legionary camps at Nijmegen, Xanten (*Vetera*), Bonn and Cologne, as well as at military camps along the Danubian *limes* in *Carnuntum* and *Brigetio* (Gesztelyi 2000, 12–13)⁴². A large number of engraved gemmae from the 1st century BC to 1st century AD was discovered at the legionary fortress of *Tilurium* in Dalmatia, on Gardun Hill near Trilj (Croatia; Kaić 2018; further reading there). Most were loose finds without an archaeological context. Nevertheless the

⁴² This correlation might solely be the result of the current state of research, however.

lack of nearby civilian buildings supports the theory that the gemmae, even if in part, had once belonged to Roman soldiers. The finds include examples with erotic symbolism and thus being unrelated with the profession of arms, yet possibly of some personal relevance to their users (Kaić 2018, 1048).

The wearing of rings with gemmae on fingers by Roman soldiers was commonplace and well attested by written sources (Zwierlein-Diehl 1986; 2007; Kaić 2020)⁴³. Some scholars connect the practice with the intensive inflow of settlers from the eastern parts of the Empire into lands along the Danube, thereby bringing the fashion of wearing rings with them. These were rings they could afford due to their wealth. The settlers from Asian provinces may have popularized the wearing of gemma decorated rings also at other locations, e.g., at *Brigetio*, one of the centres of Syrian immigrants (Gesztelyi 2000, 13; further reading there).

Hence it is likely that Roman soldiers, including those of Barbarian origin, from *auxilia* units stationed along the *limes*, were familiar with Classic grylloi presentations from readily available contact with gemmae bearing such a decorative motif.



Map 2. Range of *grylloi* presentations on Barbarian products. Pink squares: sites with artefacts decorated with *grylloi* in Barbarian context; hatched area – potential area of origin of artefacts without documented context of discovery (edit. T. Nowakiewicz)

⁴³ One explanation of this phenomena is ascribing semi-precious stones and gemma presentations with a protective function. Thus such rings were to protect soldiers from risks inherent to their profession. It is assumed that these were rarely used as seals, definitively more often as talismans and as a medium of exchange (Zwierlein-Diehl 1986, 274, 839–840; 2007, 142).

Motif of figural presentations in aedicula

In the presentation of the *gryllos* from Nidajno not only the creature itself matters, but the backdrop as well. The gilded field surrounded by oblique hatching made with straight, engraved lines is roughly rectangular shaped, with one side – beneath the *gryllos*' feet – being curved, and also decorated with three stamped triangles topped with crescents. The importance of this field is highlighted by the replacement of simple hatching with a row of stamps (Ill. 47: a, e).

The framing of the backdrop is not only part of the elaborate decoration of the fitting, but has a purpose of its own. A similar role on the above-described Roman votive plaques is performed by the *aedicula*, i.e., the presentation of a temple niche topped with an arch or gable roof, often framed with simple lines, inside which the deity – or deities – are depicted in their full form. This central element of the comparison is usually surrounded by a frame, often expanded into a broader, engraved backdrop (see Kellner, Zahlhaas 1983; Crerar 2006, 71, 74–75; Birkle 2013, 148; Ciongradi 2013, 128; Marzinzik 2019, 172–173; Steidl 2019).

The *aedicula*¹ motif consists of two pillars, columns, or pilasters holding up a beam, occasional with a fronton. This name was also used for a niche in the wall of a house for the statuette of a deity or ancestor. The *aedicula* motif spread during the Roman Empire period (its oldest, painted examples were discovered on the walls of houses in Pompeii) and was applied in both elaborate and simplified versions. It is found on votive plaques (Ill. 47: b–d, h–i), elements of personal military equipment², and on elements of architecture and relief (Obmann 2000, 9–10; Oehrl 2019; Pesch, Helmbrecht 2019, 435).

The motif of an *aedicula* on its own (without presentation of deity) is particularly widespread on scabbards of the Roman *gladius* (mostly of the Mainz type, less commonly *Vindonissa*) from the early Imperial Period in the 1st century AD. Such examples are assigned to group 2 acc. to Obmann (2000), who suggested a topological classification of scabbard decoration motifs by the degree of complexity of presentation. Other compositions with different designs are dated to the same period: *aedicula* combined with flowers, stars, rosettes, swastikas, twigs, wreaths, medallions, double-headed axes, later also palmettos, rhomboids, classic meanders, grapevines, lotus, and the running dog motif – group 3 acc. Obmann (2000). The classic *aedicula* on sword scabbards disappears in the early 2nd century, replaced with rhomboids or hourglasses – group 4 acc. Obmann (2000, 9–10).

1 The same name is used for the element of architecture (Lat. *aedes* – temple, building).

2 On later Roman votive plaques the architectural motif of the temple/*aedicula* was simplified to an arch-like frame marked with beading or ribbed notches (Hauck 1993, 415–417; Oehrl 2019, ill. 17).



Ill. 47. a, e – detail of fitting no. 8 from Nidajno with *gryllos* (Photo M. Bogacki). Statuettes and presentations of deities in temples (aedicula) on Roman votive plaques: b–c, h–i – plaques with depictions of Vulcan and Jupiter from Barkway, UK (© The Trustees of the British Museum; https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/H_1817-0308-7, https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/G_1896-0620-1; accessed on: 13.07.2020); d – presentation of Hercules on plaque from Weissenburg, Germany (Steidl 2019, 113); f – figurine of Mars from Barkway, UK (© The Trustees of the British Museum; https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/H_1817-0308-7, accessed on: 13.07.2020); g – figurine of Mars, MN (<https://www.hermann-historica.de/de/fachgebiete/antiken/>, accessed on: 07.01.2015)

The front of the depicted building usually consists of three columns, occasionally with visible bases and capitals (only a single example from *Vindonissa* depicts at least four columns with arches). The pediments often project far beyond the columns and usually are straight, much less often curved inward. Highly simplified *acroterions* are occasionally attached to the upper edge of the pediment, and in the arches between the edge and the sloped roof one may note the presence of the letter gamma motif. The entire field of the *aedicula* (and almost invariably the space between the columns) is filled with oblique or horizontal hatching. The prevalent view is that all these presentations of sword scabbards depict the camp's temple, although it lacks details allowing for unequivocal identification (e.g., the Legion's *signum*s; Obmann 2000, 11).

Aedicula with a deity is a motif used to decorate parade armour from the 1st half of the 3rd century AD (Garbsch 1978; Junkelmann 1996). Here a good example is the pair of greaves made from a silver-coated bronze, embossed sheet discovered in a hoard at Straubing and dating to the 1st half of the 3rd century. The right greave bears an effigy of Hercules facing right, standing between two columns in a niche topped with an arch. The knee cover attached to the greave bears a bust of Minerva in a Corinthian helmet, with her head turned right. The left greave bears the image of Mars turned left, standing between two columns in a niche topped with an arch. Mars is wearing a Corinthian helmet, beneath him is a pair of dolphins (Garbsch 1978, 48–49, pl. 3: 2, 3). The *aedicula* arch and columns are quite simplified, forming a frame emphasized by oblique hatching. Only the capitals are marked with a horizontal beam separating the columns from the roof arch (Ill. 48: a).

A reference to such a form of *aedicula* is visible on the fitting from Nidajno. There the arch of the niche was visually separated from the “column” and the niche's base, marked with hatching, by a pattern of triangular stamps separated by circles with a dot (Ill. 48: b).

The framing around the depiction usually served to highlight it and emphasize its importance and status, so as to make a stronger impression upon the viewer (Platt, Squire 2017b, 45–47, 384; Behr 2019, 157). The depictions of emperors, deities, and other important personages were commonly placed centrally under the arch or inside a frame, sometimes beneath an architectural element topped with an arch. Such arches and pediments are termed *fastigia*, the symbols of power and status in Greek and Roman art. They were a reference to buildings creating a sacral space, such as temples or shrines, hence were used in presentations of deities or to highlight their metaphysical presence when – instead of the deity itself – only its attributes were depicted (Behr 2019, 153–154; Pesch, Helmbrecht 2019, 435)³.

A similar procedure was used for mythical beasts in Germanic animal styles. Such beasts were usually placed inside spaces delimited with various elements, thus underscoring their non-mun-

3 A similar treatment was used on later Scandinavian *guldgubbers*. On many of them the figures are placed in the centre of the borders, which were an integral part of the stamp. These borders are interpreted as an element emphasizing the importance of the figures depicted (Watt 1992, 208, 217; Behr 2019, 153–154). According to some researchers, the *guldgubbers* have a long tradition, dating back to Roman votive plaques from Roman provincial shrines. (Hauck 1993, 413–416).

dane character (Behr 2019, 164–165). This may have been the function of the framing made by geometric stamps on the fittings from Nidajno.

The elements of the composition of the “lower” part of the palmetto fitting from Nidajno are thus evidently taken from the presentations of Roman deities in a temple niche (Mars, Jupiter, Vulcan, or female deities associated with martial cults), yet combined in a manner unique to the makers of these fittings. The image of a Roman deity is replaced with that of a *gryllos*, depicted centrally in a schematically marked niche, in a position turned by 180° versus classical presentations of this motif. Such a design may, of course, be evidence of the author having misunderstood the original meaning and message of the classic “deity in *aedicula*” presentation, of breaking up these motifs and then reassembling them according to some personal concept. Yet it is probably an intentional rearrangement, conferring a new meaning to the design of the presentations on the palmetto fitting from Nidajno, a meaning undecipherable to us at present.

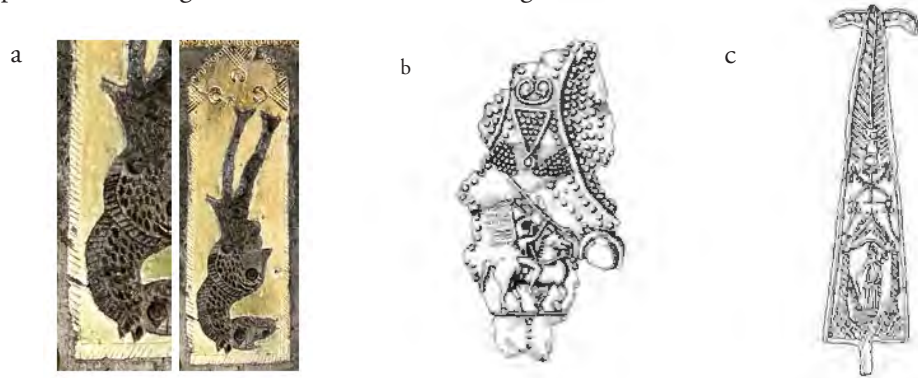


Ill. 48. a – depictions of a deity in aedicula: Hercules (grave no. B10) and Mars (grave no. B11) from Straubing, Germany (Garbsch 1978, pl. 3: 2, 3); b – detail from fitting no. 8 from Nidajno: outline of niche with columns symbolically marked with hatching (Photo M. Bogacki)

Lunar motif

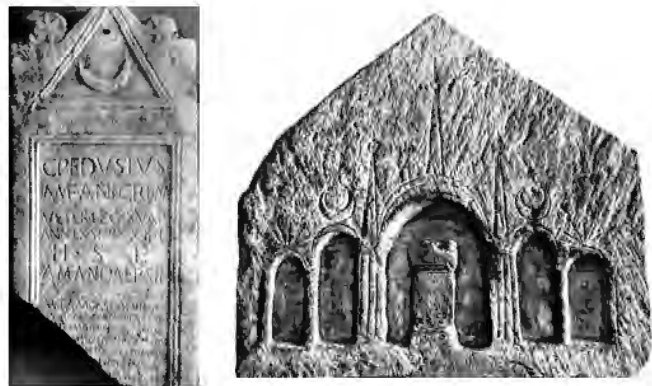
It may be presumed that every outstanding element of the design decorating the palmetto fitting from Nidajno is in some sort of semantic relationship with the remaining elements, hence one should examine the less pronounced motifs. One example is the combination of three triangular stamps topped with crescents, with tops turned towards one another, placed underneath the arch of the “niche” and under the “feet” of the *gryllos* (Ill. 49: a). It may be regarded as a purely decorative element, yet its combination with the presentation of the *gryllos* grants it a larger dimension. A similar composition of three triangles decorates a fragment of a gold belt accessory (made with repoussé) from the lavish princely burial no. II from Krakovany-Stráž

in Slovakia (Ill. 49: b). The motif accompanies the depiction of a rider (a presentation of the “Thracian rider” type, motif B11 acc. Przybyła [2018, 25]). Both presentations, from Nidajno and Krakovany-Stráže, combine the equine and anthropomorphic motifs. In the case of the latter artefact the triangles are made from punched points; the sides of the central/upper triangle, topped with circle with dot, are additionally emphasized with an outline (Prohászka 2006). The very design of triangular stamps on the fitting from Nidajno is not exceptional in itself – rather, it is their combination with the motif of three crescents which is unique. Crescent stamps are rare to begin with, and in such an arrangement – unheard of.



Ill. 49. a – detail of a *gryllos* presentation on the palmetto fitting from Nidajno (Photo M. Bogacki); b – detail of an accessory from Krakovany-Stráže, Slovakia, burial II (Quast 2009a, ill. 73); c – votive plaque from Cologne, Germany (Schäfer 2011, ill. 3)

Astral symbology with depictions of the Sun, Moon, and stars is often found in decorations of Roman weaponry, usually on horse harnesses and standards (*vexilla*; Künzl, E. 1998, 419). It also appears as an element of presentations on grave and sacrificial *stellae* dedicated to various deities (Ill. 50: a). A quite particular example of its use in a Roman context is a tuff slab from Brohltal, Kr. Ahrweiler in Germany (Ill. 50: b).



Ill. 50. a – memorial *stella* from Carnuntum, Austria, with elements of astral symbolism; b – slab with presentations of altar from Brohltal, Kr. Ahrweiler, Germany (Krause 2015, 159)

A relief showing five niches with altars, separated by columns was carved into the slab. The arches above the niches are topped with bundles of rays and crescents, and the central niche with three tall triangles (cones) is topped with spheres. The engraved inscription on the central altar informs about its dedication to Jupiter Optimus Maximus and Hercules Saxanus by soldiers of the VI, X and XXII legions, from the cavalry, infantry cohorts, and the Rhine flotilla. The slab is dated to 101–103 AD – the time in office of legate Quintus Acutius Nerva mentioned in the inscription (Lehner 1918, 55–56, no. 113; Espérandieu 1922, 320–321; 1938, pl. CIII: 6398; Krause 2015, 158–160). In the presentations of rays, crescents, and spheres topping the *aediculae* scholars see astral symbolism and a link to the cult of the seven astral bodies (Sun, Moon, Mars, Mercury, Jupiter, Venus, and Saturn) and their corresponding days of the week. This cult had Oriental roots and found its way to the Rhine provinces from the Mediterranean. The Brohltal slab attests to syncretism combining this cult with that of Jupiter Optimus Maximus, even more likely due to the diverse cultural backgrounds of the legionaries stationed on the Rhine (Lehner 1918, 56; Krause 2015, 169).

Astral symbology, particularly in eastern religions, is commonly associated with presentations of a holy mountain as an object of devotion. An example of such objectification is Mount Argaios in Cappadocia⁴. Ancient Cappadocians believed that it was inhabited by gods and goddesses. Signs of such a cult are visible in the crowning of grave *stellae* with triangles representing the holy mountain, with additional spherical elements at their tops. Presentations of Mount Argaios (in various versions) are a characteristic element of reverses of Cappadocian coinage (Ill. 51: b–e; Sydenham 1978; Blömer, Winter 2018; Blömer 2019; Belis 2021).

The presentations of Mt. Argaios on coins are quite standardized. The outline of the mountain is always triangular, with rocks marked on its surface. In the centre of the mountain there usually is a spherical element surrounded with dots, probably representing a cave or a niche for a cult statue. The mountain is surrounded by elements resembling needles or cones – likely depictions of flames representing volcanic activity. The standardization of Mt. Argaios in presentations is also linked to its cult depictions as an *agalma*, a model cast in metal and placed in a temple, often on the altar, as shown on the reverse of a Julia Maesa didrachma from 219 AD. (Ill. 51: b; Weiß 1985; Blömer, Winter 2018; Belis 2021; further literature there). On some types of coins the peak of the holy mountain features a star, a crescent, a sun with rays, or an eagle (Ill. 51: d).

4 Erciyes Dağı – an extinct volcano in Turkey, some 25 km to the south of the city of Kayseri. The highest mountain in central Anatolia – 3917 m asl (https://pl.wikipedia.org/wiki/Erciyes_Dağı; accessed on: 9.12.2021). In antiquity from its summit it was possible to see both the Black and Mediterranean Seas (Strabo, *Geografia* II). The city of Cappadocian Caesarea (today Kayseri in Turkey) lay at its feet, and in Strabo's times was called Mazaka and served as the capital of the Roman province of Cilicia. The name Caesarea was given by Archelaus (36 BC–14 AD), the last king of Cappadocia and a Roman vassal; although the name may have been conferred by Tiberius himself (Everett-Heath 2020). The city lay on the crossroads of the Persian Royal Road and the route from Sinope towards the Euphrates. In Roman times these were joined by the road from Ephesus. The city came under Roman rule in 17BC and was destroyed by Shapur I after his victory over Valerian in 260 AD (see Weiß 1985; Blömer 2019).



Ill. 51. Presentations of the holy mountain Argaios on a gemmae and coins from Cappadocian Caesarea: a – iron ring with gemma depicting Argaios, topped with eagle with laurel wreath, with stars on both sides, 2–3rd century AD (https://www.gmcoinart.de/auction/SCHMUCK_Fragment%20eines%20Eisenrings%20mit%20Gemme.aspx?rownum=734&backid=ib635360395444549312&lager=00108&los=1067&ActiveID=1511&lang=en, accessed on: 12.05.2019); b – didrachma of Julia Maesa, 219 (1775095_1616080975.l.jpg (617x329) (bidder.com), accessed on: 20.02.2019); c–d – didrachmas of Emperor Hadrian (117-138; Cappadocia, Caesarea-Eusebia. AR Didrachm. AD 128. (vcoins.com), accessed on: 18.03.2020); e – an Alexander Severus coin from 224 AD with cult image (agalma) of holy mountain Argaios in an *aedicula* (37206_0.jpg (1000x506) (auctionserver.net), accessed on: 20.02.2019))

Coins bearing the presentation of Mt. Argaios come from between 101 BC and 17 AD, the period of the alliance between Cappadocia and Rome. No such coins from the Hellenistic period are known, in spite of the cult of the holy mountain already being extant, as it had appeared even earlier, in pre-Greek times. One of the explanations tabled is that the Romans re-introduced this cult in the context of the Roman triad of Jupiter – Helios – Serapis as to sway the inhabitants of Caesarea to the idea of *Summus Deus* – the Supreme God (Weiß 1985; Rovithis-Livaniou, Rovithis 2015, 198, Ill. 7; 2017; Blömer 2019).

An interesting parallel for the presentations of a holy mountain with astral elements in this context is the silver coinage of the Western Satraps of India, showing peaks topped with crescents and the Sun (Ill. 52). Roman trade routes ran far into the East, to India, assuring the Empire of an inflow of a broad range of goods and products from that part of the world, with one of many examples being the discovery of a Western Satrap Rudrasena III coin at the Roman port town of *Berenice* in Egypt (Ill. 52: c; Korać et al. 2014, 8–10, ill. 11).



Ill. 52. Coins of Western Satraps with presentations of mountain holy caves topped with lunar and motifs and solar on the reverse: a – Rudrasimha I (178–197; File:Western Satrap Coin of Rudrasimha I .jpg - Wikipedia; accessed on: 28.02.2020) with legend in barbarized Greek on obverse; b – Rudrasena II (256–278; File:Rudrasena II Circa 256-278 CE.jpg - Wikimedia Commons, accessed on: 28.02.2020); c – a Rudrasena III coin (362) from *Berenice*, Egypt (Korać et al. 2014, ill. 11)

5.2. Fitting with five beasts (no. 7)

Motif of animal chase/hunt

Another impressive fitting rich in iconographic content is decorated with the motif of a chase of five fantastical beasts (Ill. 53). In spite of their simplification, the four beasts (facing right⁵) may still be identified, respectively, as a dolphin, a capricorn and two gryphons. The identity of the fifth, presented differently than the others, i.e., facing left, is problematic, and is tentatively described as a dragon (see Nowakiewicz, Rzeszotarska-Nowakiewicz 2012, 101; more on this below).



Ill. 53. The five beasts fitting from Nidajno (no. 7; Photo M. Bogacki)

⁵ The description of zoomorphic motifs in this work uses heraldic terminology (i.e., facing left or right) but – for simplification – skipping the distinction between “heraldic side” and “viewer side”.

Similar scenes are commonplace in ancient art and are termed the chase or hunt. In Roman tradition hunting scenes, circus scenes with animals, and presentations of mythological beasts⁶ were often used in the visual arts, with animal motifs found on weaponry and utilitarian items, especially metal ones and on *terra sigillata* (Willers 1901, 66; Künzl, E. 1998).

Elements of personal military equipment

From the various elements of military and parade equipment from the Early Empire the motif of the chase was used on 1st century *cingula* fittings – the belts used to suspend the *gladius*. The fittings decorated with figural motifs (hunting, lotus flowers, busts with two cornucopias, and *lupa romana*) were catalogued as type B.4 in the *cingula* fittings classification acc. Stefanie Hoss. The motif of a chase or hunt (type B.4.a acc. Hoss) is always presented in the form of a frieze running around the fitting's central node (Künzl, E. 1994; 1998; Niemeyer 2010; Hoss 2014, 219–224). This is due to the item's shape determining the arrangement.

The chase presentations on type B.4.a fittings show strong similarity to the decorations on the fitting from Nidajno. The similarity becomes even more apparent once the design of five (usually) animals – one, or more, looking in the opposite direction than the rest – arranged around the node is “straightened” into a linear depiction. Hence I consider these to be close analogies⁷.

The origin of the chase motif on *cingula* type B.4.a fittings is identified with zoomorphic presentations dating to one hundred years previously on imported late Hellenistic parade phalerae, known from finds in Western Europe and the Balkans. Examples come from a hoard on Sark (Channel Islands), Oberaden, and Helden (Germany) as well as Stara Zagora (Bulgaria), discovered in Celtic and Getae-Dacian contexts (Ill. 54). Hellenistic phalerae of this type, manufactured in North Pontic centres, also are known from the Early Sarmatian context on the Eurasian Steppe and in the Caucasus (Ill. 55)⁸. Their later variants are dated to the 1st century BC. The youngest

6 In the literature on the subject the terms chase and hunt are often used alternatively. In some cases it is difficult to determine, owing to the simplified nature of the motif, whether we are looking at a depiction of a hunt, a circus scene, park scene, or mythological event. The common link between all of the above are running animals, hence I use the term chase.

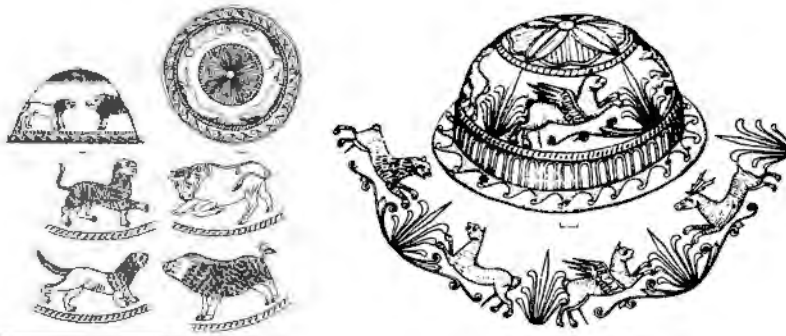
7 The template for chase presentation on *cingula* fittings is analogous in iconographic terms to that of the fitting from Nidajno; they also share the same function (a fitting for leather belt), while they differ in the style of presentations and technique of make.

8 The style of depictions on phalerae from the Sarmatian context is strongly connected to Oriental art and combines the Greek-Oriental style with the North Pontic. The manner of depicting animals is characteristic of nomads, with visible influence of civilizations from Asia Minor and Persia. The imaginarium consists of local fauna (lions, panthers) or fictional fear-inspiring creatures (various type of gryphons, sphinxes). Fifteen items from West Europe (13 from Sark, one each from Oberaden and Helden) show stylistic and iconographic parallels with Greek-Oriental examples and Asian Minor or Persian influence. Their *bestiarium* includes actual animals (elephants, lions, panthers) and mythical beasts (gryphons, various hybrids; Sîrbu, Bârca 2016, 284–287).

specimen, from Oberaden, is well dated to the middle of the reign of Octavian Augustus, between 27 BC and 14 AD (Grew, Griffiths 1991; Hoss 2014, 220; Sîrbu, Bârca 2016, 289–290).

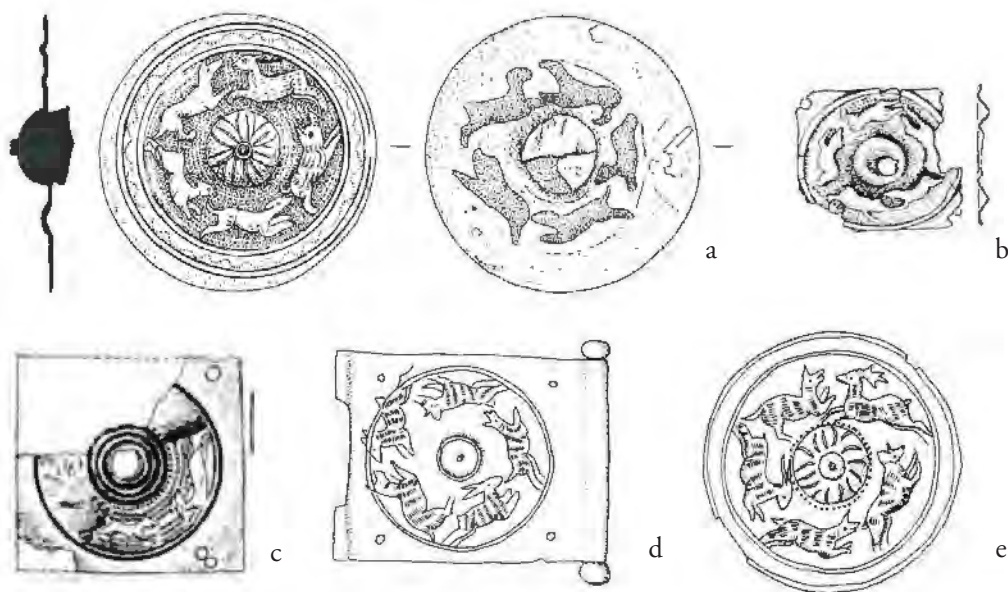


Ill. 54. Hellenistic phalerae: a–b – two large phalerae from Sark, Channel Islands (Allen 1968); c – phalera from Rijksmuseum van Natuurlijke Historie, Leiden (https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/thumb/7/7f/Rijksmuseum_van_Oudheden%2C_schatten_uit_Limburg%2C_sierschijf_van_Helden_1.JPG/600px-Rijksmuseum_van_Oudheden%2C_schatten_uit_Limburg%2C_sierschijf_van_Helden_1.JPG, accessed on: 9.12.2021); d – phalera from Stara Zagora, Bulgaria (Hachmann 1991, 685)



Ill. 55. Hellenistic phalerae from Early Sarmatian context : a – Starobielsk, Lugansk, Ukraine; b – Tvardica, Taraclia, Moldavia (Sîrbu, Bârca 2016, 299, ill. 9.9, 9.6)

The plainly visible similarity between late Hellenistic phalerae from the 1st century BC (the earliest from its 2nd half) from Western Europe and *cingula* type B.4.a fittings is a major argument in the discussion over the origin and main area of use of the described motif of animal chase in the north-western Roman provinces. Such belt fittings appeared in territories which previously imported parade phalerae from the Black Sea basin, mostly from the Pontic. The decorative motifs used, due to visual appeal – and possibly content (filtered by the locals through their own cultural perceptions) – were adapted, transformed, and reproduced on items belonging to a different category of personal effects, with this motif being spread by way of Roman soldiery all across the Empire. This observation applies to military belt fittings type B.4.a, discovered along the Rhine and in Britannia: single finds of such items were discovered at Chichester (UK), Hofheim am Taunus, Moers-Asberg, Augsburg (Germany), two examples in Magdalensberg (Austria), and three at *Vindonissa* (Windisch, Switzerland). Furthermore, at Colchester (UK) a patrix to make fittings of this type was discovered (Künzl, E. 1998, 409–410, pl. 4, ill. 13: 4–6, 8). The list of such artefacts concludes with the fitting from the shrine at Gurzufskoe Sedlo (Crimea, Ukraine), brought there by the Roman military (Новиченкова, Н.Г. 1998, ill. 13: 4).

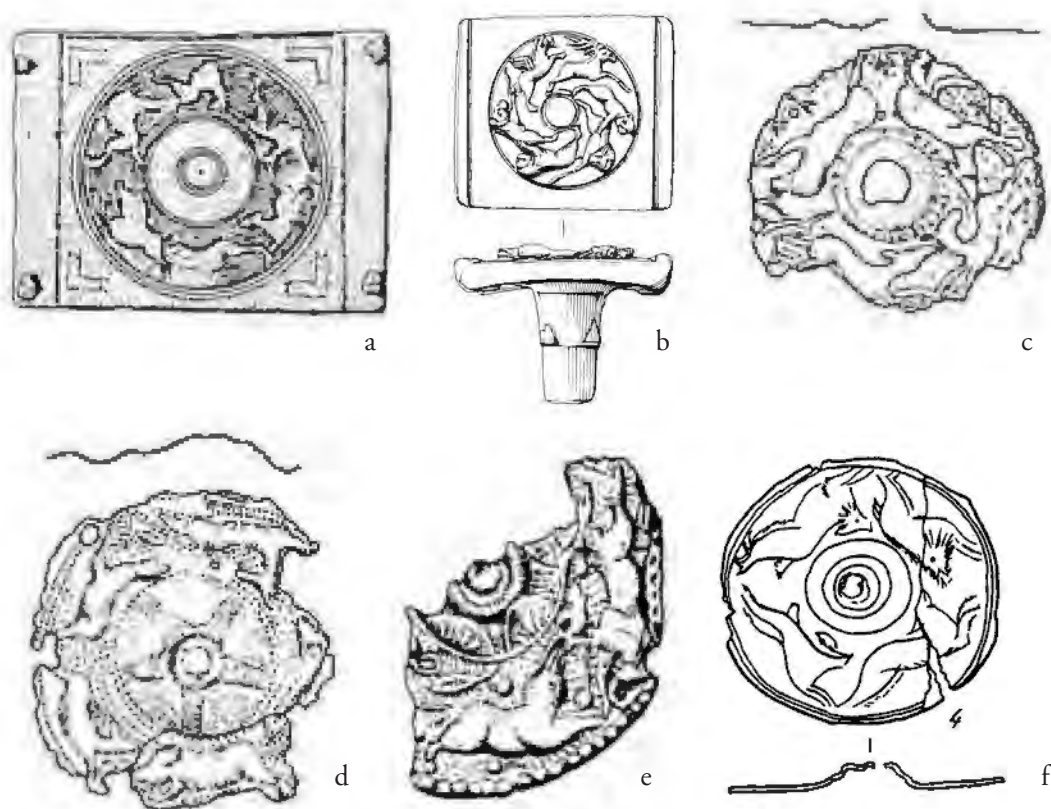


Ill. 56. Fitting type B.4.a acc. Hoss with motif of animal chase: a – *Asciburgium* / Moers-Asberg, Germany; b – *Augusta Vindelicum* / Augsburg, Germany; c – Hofheim am Taunus, Germany; d–e – Magdalensberg, Austria (Hoss 2014, pl. 39)

The animal chase motif on *cingula* fittings follows a single template, replicated with minor changes on all known examples. The circular piece of a belt fitting made from punched bronze sheet from the legionary camp at *Asciburgium* (Moers-Asberg, Germany) is decorated with a node with a rosette surrounded by presentations of running animals: a hare, dog, wild boar, and deer (to the left) and another dog (to the right, Ill. 56: a; Künzl, E. 1998, 462, no. C 21; Deschler-Erb 2012, 55–59, ill. 22, 23, pl. 7: C 16; Hoss 2014, 115, pl. 39: B.668). A similar template was used for the damaged rectangular applique from punched bronze sheet from the *castrum* at *Augusta Vindelicum* (Augsburg, Germany): four animals run to the left, and one to the right (Ill. 56: b; Bakker 1985, ill. 59: 7; Künzl, E. 1998, 462, no. C 24; Hoss 2014, 114, pl. 39: B.666). The relief motif of animal chase is also visible on a partly preserved applique punched bronze sheet from Hofheim am Taunus (Germany), where two (of an original five?) animals may be discerned: a dog and probably a deer (Ill. 56: c; Ritterling 1912, pl. XII: 15; Künzl, E. 1998, 464, no. C 43; Hoss 2014, 115, pl. 39: B.667). Further examples come from Magdalensberg (Austria), from the site of *Claudium Virunum*, the capital of Noricum province in the 1st century AD. The first – from bronze sheet with a round rivet in the centre and four rivet holes in the corners – is decorated with a circular frieze with a chase of five animals: a hare, dog, wild boar, and deer running to the left, with another dog running to the right (Ill. 56: d; Deimel 1987, 295, cat. no. 77/13, pl. 77; Bishop, Coulston 2006; Künzl, E. 1998, 461, no. C 17, ill. 13: 5; Hoss 2014, 115, pl. 39: B.671). The second example from Magdalensberg – a circular applique on a belt fitting – features an identical composition (a hare, dog, wild boar, and deer running to the left, and another dog running to the right in confrontation with the deer). The central node is decorated with engraved ornamentation forming a rosette analogous to the decoration of the fitting from Moers-Asberg, yet with an extra circular pattern of punched points, here having an analogy in the fitting from Hofheim am Taunus (Ill. 56: e; Deimel 1987, 295, cat. no. 77/14, pl. 77; Künzl, E. 1998, 461–462, no. C 18; ill. 13: 6; Deschler-Erb 2012; Hoss 2014, 115, pl. 39: B.672).

Three circular fittings with type B.4.a pattern made in relief technique from punched, bronze, tin- or silver-coated sheet come from *Vindonissa* (Windisch) in Switzerland. The first, discovered on the grounds of a legionary camp, is a fragmentarily preserved fitting with a central node surrounded with a relief with the animal chase motif (two dogs, a wild boar, and a deer, Ill. 57: c; Unz, Deschler-Erb 1997, 32, pl. 36: 876; Künzl, E. 1998, 463–464, no. C 42; Deschler-Erb 2012; Hoss 2014, 115, pl. 39: B.673). The very same motif is visible on the circumference of the partly preserved second fitting – against the punched background it is possible to discern two dogs, a wild boar, a deer, and the head of a fifth animal (Ill. 57: d; Unz, Deschler-Erb 1997, 33, pl. 36: 877; Hoss 2014, 115, pl. 39: B.674). The third example, from Windisch-Königsfelden, is also a fragmentarily preserved fitting (discovered together with a scabbard in a legionary's burial) with a central node surrounded by a chase scene (a dog confronting a hoofed animal, against

a background of schematically presented landscape with leaves and round fruit, Ill. 57: e; Deschler-Erb 1996, 20, ill. 8: 6; Künzl, E. 1998, 463, no. C 41; Hoss 2014, 115, pl. 39: B.677).



Ill. 57. a – fitting of type B.4.a acc. Hoss with animal chase from *Noviomagus Reginorum* / Chichester, UK; b – patrix for making type B.4.a acc. Hoss fittings from *Camulodunum* / Colchester, UK; c–e – fittings from *Vindonissa* / Windisch, Switzerland (Hoss 2014, pl. 39); f – Gurzufskoe Sedlo, Crimea, Ukraine (Новиченкова, Н.Г. 1998, ill. 13: 4)

Further fittings of this type are known from Britannia. At Chichester (*Noviomagus Reginorum*, UK) four fittings dated to the Claudian period were discovered. The fittings have four rivet holes in the corners and bear an impressed motif of a chase (a dog between a hare and wild boar, a dog and a deer) on a square frame (Ill. 57: a; Grew, Griffiths 1991, cat. no. 66, 67, ill. 10,64; Künzl, E. 1998, 460, no. C8; Hoss 2014, 115, pl. 39: B.670). A particularly interesting find is the copper alloy patrix used to make such fittings from Colchester-Sheepen (*Camulodunum*, UK; Niblett 1985, 122, ill. 66: 61; 167, pl. 14: 61; Deschler-Erb 1996, 27, ill. 15). The find comes from the

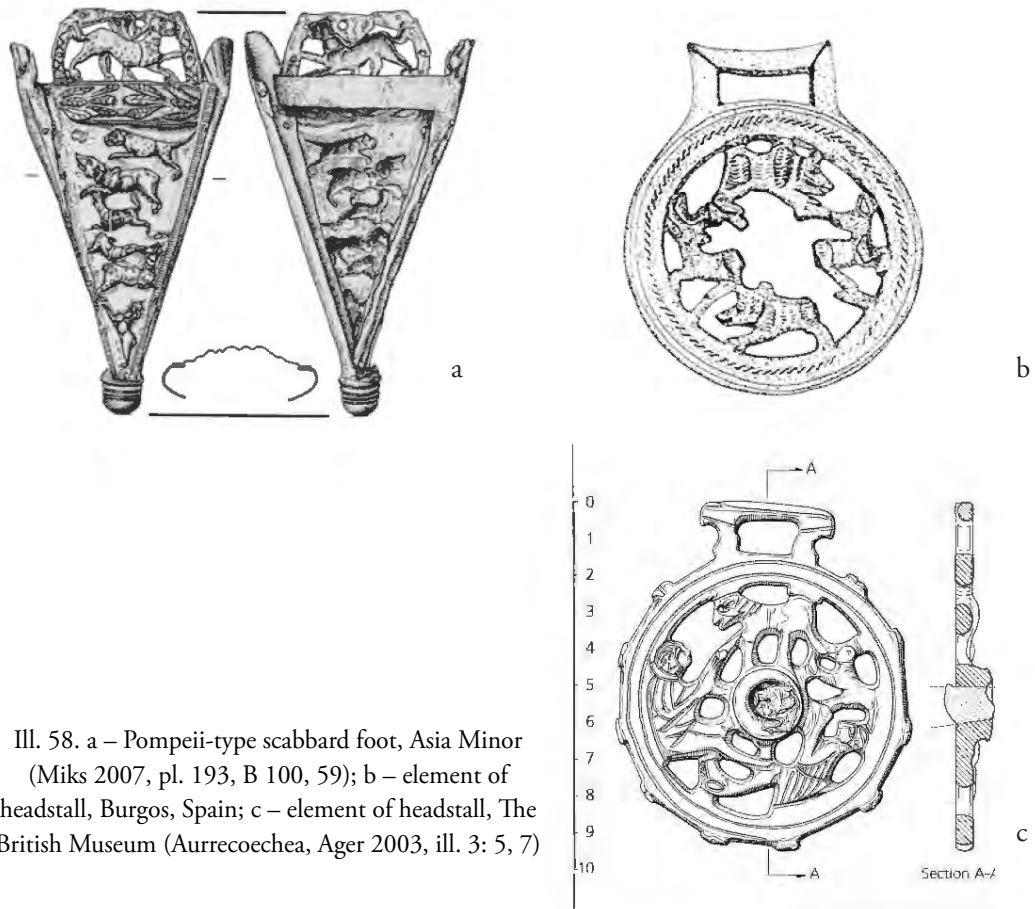
vicus of a Roman fort, from a wooden cellar burned before 61AD. The surface of the patrix was made in high relief and used to impress the rectangular design – a circular chase scene. All six beasts – a deer, lion, bull?, lion, lion?, and a gryphon – run in the same direction, to the right (Ill. 57: b; Niblett 1985, 12, 42, 112; Deschler-Erb 1996, 27, ill. 15; Künzl, E. 1998, 464, no. C48, Ill. 13: 8; Hoss 2014, 181, pl. 39: B.670)⁹.

The sole type B.4.a fitting discovered far outside the north-western provinces of the Roman Empire comes from Gurzufskoe Sedlo in the Crimea. This is a circular fitting cut out from bronze and silver-coated sheet depicting the chase of four schematically presented animals running in opposite directions (two to the left, two to right, Ill. 57: f). The fitting was discovered at a shrine in the Crimean Mountains, among fragments of Roman military equipment (equestrian as well), tools, coins, elements of dress, jewellery, statuettes, and other items of Roman origin associated with the presence of a Roman garrison in the North Pontic area between the 1st century BC to the early 2nd century AD (Новиченкова, Н.Г. 1998, 63–64, 66–67, ill. 13: 4; Novičenkova 2003, 295–298; Новиченкова, М.В. 2017).

As concerns dating, chase-decorated fittings first appeared under Tiberius, i.e., sometime in the 1st third of the 1st century, gained in popularity under Claudius, and were used probably up to the early Flavian period (Deschler-Erb E., Peter, Deschler-Erb S. 1991, 26; Deschler-Erb 1999; 2012; Künzl, E. 1998; Hoss 2014, 220, 225). As already noted, their highest incidence was in the north western provinces of the Empire, where their manufacturing centres were probably located (Künzl, E. 1994; 1998; Niemeyer 2010; Hoss 2014; 2019, 224).

Hence it transpires that the custom of decorating military belt fittings with the motif of the chase had to arise at the turn of the eras in Roman military circles in the north-west of the Empire, and then inspiring contemporary and later decorations of other elements of military equipment. One example may be a contemporary of type B.4.a acc. Hoss fittings – namely, a Pompeii-type scabbard shoe from Asia Minor (Künzl, E. 1998; Miks 2007, 230–231, pl. 193: B 100), for this motif is used on the sheet of its obverse. The openwork upper part of the fitting contains the presentation of a dog (right oriented); the lower part – inside the triangle determined by the shape of the shoe – shows six animal presentations: a predator? (upward, left), hind and dog (right), dog and bear (?) and lioness (to the left; Ill. 58: a). Such Pompeii-type *gladius* scabbard shoes are dated to between 30–40 AD up to the 1st quarter of the 2nd century (Miks 2007, 230–231, pl. 193, B 100, 59; Костромичев, Масякин 2013, 38, ill. 5).

9 It should be noted that part of presentations from the above mentioned fittings is indistinct due to the poor state of preservation, as well as shoddy make and simplification, e.g., some of the fittings from Windisch. This is why identification of some of the animals is uncertain.



Ill. 58. a – Pompeii-type scabbard foot, Asia Minor (Miks 2007, pl. 193, B 100, 59); b – element of headstall, Burgos, Spain; c – element of headstall, The British Museum (Aurrecoechea, Ager 2003, ill. 3: 5, 7)

A long history of depictions of the chase or hunt is visible in horse harness elements coming from a later period – e.g., on late Roman, openwork cheekpieces with figural depictions. Using iconographic criteria, three main types were distinguished: 1. grappling animals in heraldic pose (often panthers or dolphins); 2. horses in various configurations; 3. mythological scenes or depictions of chase or hunting wild animals (Aurrecoechea, Ager 2003, 280–287). Type 3 is represented by two openwork, round elements of headstall from Burgos (?) in Spain (Ill. 58: b; Aurrecoechea, Ager 2003, 283–287, ill. 3: 7) and a similar element of headstall from Seville, decorated with the motive of chase on the internal circumference of the frame (a bear, with a dog, deer, and wild boar turning their heads toward it). This group also include a non-published pair of elements of headstall from the British Museum collection (Ill. 58: c), with a unique scene of a large chase composed of images in a circular arrangement (lion chased by dog on the right and attacked by a hunter with javelin on the right, with another hunter behind the dog). Analogous hunting scenes also appear on Ibero-Roman bronze wagon fittings (Aurrecoechea, Ager 2003,

287). Iberian cheekpieces with figural presentations are broadly dated to the 4-5th centuries and are a typical product of local smiths. These represent an iconographic type characteristic of Late Empire wares, popular in all provinces (Aurrecochea, Ager 2003, 280–287).

Iconographic motifs drawing upon circus and amphitheatre scenes including animals and hunt-related imagery were placed on various elements of armour and personal effects of Roman military personnel. The redeployment of military units spread such items around the Empire and its border areas, often becoming inspiration for local manufacture. Such a motif was already known, particularly from the north-west of the Empire and the Balkans (where its Hellenistic roots were combined with local Celtic and Getae-Dacian elements), yet in its more popular and standardized form it was popularized specifically by the Roman army.

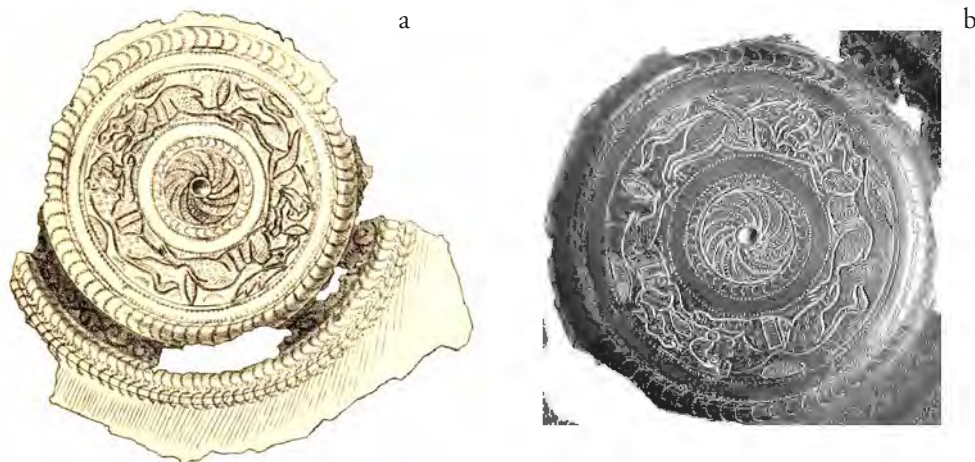
Provincial Roman vessels

Hunting, circus-related presentations, and the chase are widespread motifs of metal (often luxury) vessels manufactured in the Roman Empire practically throughout its entire existence (see Lund Hansen 1987; 1995; 2016). The motifs used to decorate several provincial Roman vessels from the 3rd century – especially the bronze type Eggers 83 bowl from burial I in Wrocław-Zakrzów¹⁰ and Hemmoor type buckets with animalistic frieze – are stylistically and iconographically close to the decorations on items from Nidajno.

Bowls of the Eggers 83 type are ubiquitous in Roman provinces between the Rhine and eastern Alps, mostly dated to the 1st half of the 3rd century. These are found in Germanic burials, above all in assemblages dated to phase C₂ (Eggers 1951, pl. 9: 83; Lund Hansen 1995, 179–180; Quast 2016, 340–342, ill. 6). Only the bottom part – decorated with the motif of the animal chase arranged around a circular central element – was preserved from the Wrocław-Zakrzów bowl. The engraved and stamped scene presents a stand-off between a gryphon (to the right) and a deer or elk (to the left), plus a lioness (to the right) confronting a doe/elk cow (to the left). The torsos of the deer/elk, lioness and doe/elk cow are bound, which in Roman art denotes a captive animal (Ill. 59). Similar presentations of animal chase or hunting scenes, in the form of a circular frieze placed below the external rim of the vessel, may be seen on Hemmoor type buckets from the same time horizon (Grempler 1887, 9, pl. IV: 6; Quast 2016, 340–342)¹¹.

10 The decorated bowl probably had been hung from the four-legged support discovered in the same burial. This is the sole example of an item of this type decorated with animal chase motif (Quast 2016, 340–342).

11 The equipment of Barbarian “princely” burials includes a large number of Roman metal vessels. At Wrocław-Zakrzów imported vessels were found exclusively in male graves. Burial I contained a Hemmoor type bucket, while its equivalent in the female Burial II was a bronze, reinforced stave bucket. Additionally the Hemmoor bucket from Burial I is one of the rare silver examples. Gommern in Germany also produced several artefacts with a few analogues from Gallic hoards (Quast 2016, 337). In



Ill. 59. Bowl from Wrocław-Zakrzów, burial I (Grempler 1887, 9, pl. IV: 6 [a]; Quast 2016, ill. 6 [b])

Brass¹² Hemmoor buckets of type Eggers 55–65 (Ill. 60; Eggers 1951, pl. 7: 55–65)¹³ are known chiefly from discoveries in Galia Belgica, Germania Superior, and Germania Inferior, and were manufactured chiefly in Gaul and along the Rhine. Their spread along the Danube is associated with the redeployment of Roman units from the Rhine to the middle Danube (Künzl, S. 1993, 177–179; Künzl, S., Künzl, E. 1993; Becker 2016, 7, 20–22, ill. 6; Luik 2016, ill. 2). In the *Barbaricum* such buckets were most often found in Denmark and north-west and central Germany, in hoards and skeleton burials, and in Lower Saxony in cremation burials. A few examples were discovered outside this area, ranging from the eastern coast of Britannia to the Crimea (Lund Hansen 1987, 71–73, pl. 7: 55–66; 1995, 178–179; 2016, 239, ill. 5; Becker 2016, 7, 20–22, ill. 6). The buckets are dated from the late 2nd century to about the middle of the 3rd century. The oldest variant is represented by the silver or silver-coated buckets of type Eggers 60 – known from opulent burials of the Germanic elite e.g., from Wrocław-Zakrzów, Burial I, and Gommern¹⁴. The younger horizon of their incidence is marked by hoards of loot taken on raids between 233

the *Barbaricum* these items must have been strikingly unusual and doubtlessly enormously raised the prestige of their owner. It is highly likely that they had little if any practical use, their relevance being mostly in the ideological sphere. The accumulation of such goods in the hands of particular “families” suggests the creation of “treasures” as a *sine qua non* element of power. Descriptions of such treasures are known from the later written record, particularly from the Migration Period onward (Quast 2016, 344).

12 Form-pressed technique. Additional ornament was engraved (Petrovsky, Bernhard 2016, 254–260, pl. 3).

13 Hans J. Eggers distinguished Hemmoor type buckets decorated with figural frieze as type 55, yet owing to the barely discernible chronological differences in the entire range of types between numbers 55 to 65, in literature the commonly used term is “type 55–65” (see Eggers 1951).

14 Hemmoor type buckets made part of sets used by Germanic elites to serve wine or other drinks (Quast 2009a).

and 275 AD in Gaul and Rhetia and then hidden along the Rhine, and from later Scandinavian assemblages. The dating of Hemmoor type buckets decorated with animal frieze is inside the chronological limits defined by the 40-year long period of Barbarian raids in the middle of the 3rd century (Künzl, S. 1993; 2010, 175–178, diag. 1; Lund Hansen 1987, 71–73; 1995, 178–179; Quast 2009a; 2016, 336–340, tab. 2; Becker 2010; Petrovszky, Bernhard 2016, 254–260, pl. 3; Luik 2016, ill. 2).



Ill. 60. Bucket no. 3 from Hemmoor, Warstad, Germany (<https://heimatvereinhemmoor.de/hemmoorium>, accessed on: 9.12.2021)

Hemmoor type buckets decorated with zoomorphic frieze are the richest source for the analysis of the animal chase motif on metal Roman provincial vessels. These friezes are among the best examples— in artistic terms – of provincial workmanship in decorating bronze wares (Willers 1901, 144). Going by iconographic content criteria, three groups may be distinguished: scenes with mythological sea monsters, park scenes, and hunting scenes¹⁵.

¹⁵ Traditionally three types of hunting scenes are distinguished in ancient art: 1. mythological events, such as the Calydonian boar hunt, labours of Heracles; 2. depictions of hunts with beaters and combat of *bestiarii* with beasts in circus or amphitheatre, i.e., *venatio*; 3. hunt “in the wild” or on Imperial preserves (Vida 2017, 67). As Hemmoor type bucket friezes solely show hunters in one presentation variant – in hunts “in the wild” or on natural preserves – such presentations are termed simply “hunting scenes”.

The maritime motifs on Hemmoor type buckets may be seen on four examples: three discovered in Germany – at Stolzenau on the Weser, Häven, and Heddernheim inside the city limits of Frankfurt am Main, and one in Denmark – at Himlingøje.

On the Stolzenau bucket the frieze (partly destroyed) was made with high diligence and care for the densely placed, modelled and engraved composition details (Ill. 61; Willers 1901, 145, pl. 1: 4, 5: 1).



Ill. 61. Frieze on Hemmoor type bucket from Stolzenau, Germany (Willers 1901, pl. V: 1)

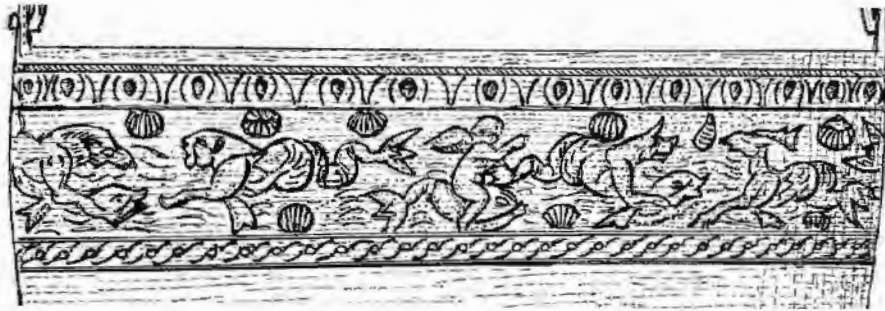
The maritime scene consists of four groups of creatures, the main being a triton catching some fantastical beast. In the first group the triton is accompanied by an unidentified sea hybrid, a dolphin, lobster, and griffin with fish tail; in the second – a capricorn, sea lion, sea panther (lion and panther with fish tails), and a dolphin; in the third the triton is fighting a bull with a fish tail; the fourth group resembles the second – the triton is holding a hippocampus by its tail, and is accompanied by a bear with fish tail. Sea waves are drawn with lines, the background being filled with seashells. Silver incrustation is fragmentarily preserved (Willers 1901, 145).



Ill. 62. Frieze on a Hemmoor type bucket from Häven, Germany (Willers 1901, pl. IX: 1)



Ill. 63. Frieze on a Hemmoor type bucket from Heddernheim, Germany (Willers 1901, pl. IX: 2)



Ill. 64. Bucket from Himlingøje, Denmark, no. C 24129 (Lund Hansen 1995, 545, pl. 74: C 24129)

The frieze decorating the bucket from Häven (Ill. 62; Willers 1901, 55, ill. 26, pl. 9: 1; Lund Hansen 1995, 545, pl. 74: C 24129) presents four pairs of animals (two of which are separated by a Cupid on a dolphin). The first pair is a gryphon confronting an unidentified hybrid, the second – a bear fighting a bull, the third – a wild boar and bear, the fourth – a panther and deer in melee. All were given fantastical character by the addition of a fish tail. Waves are marked with lines and the background is filled with seashells (Willers 1901, 146). On the frieze decorating the bucket from Heddernheim (Ill. 63) the groups of animals, just as on the example from Häven, also are separated by a Cupid. The background is filled not only with seashells but also with small fish (Willers 1901, 67, pl. 2: 5; 9: 2)¹⁶. The decoration of the bucket from Himlingøje (Denmark z 1949 r.; ill. 64) is analogous to the frieze on the bucket from Häven (Lund Hansen 1995, 545, pl. 74: C 24129).

¹⁶ The two buckets were made at the same workshop, as attested by the manner of decoration and presence of copper coating on the cymation ornament in both friezes. Friezes on the buckets from Häven and Heddernheim differ from the Stolzenau example in craftsman technique, as they do not bear relief but deep contour. The drawings on internal walls were also highlighted with engraving, with the frieze on the Häven bucket being better made (Willers 1901, 67, 147).

The group of buckets decorated with hunting, circus, or park scenes includes seven examples: buckets nos. 2, 3, and 12 from Hemmoor, Kr. Cuxhaven (Germany), from Grabow, Ludwigslust (Germany), from Emmerthal, Börby, Hameln-Pyrmont (Germany), from Himlingøje, Præstø (Denmark) and from Nijmegen, Gelderland (Netherlands). Hunting/park scenes are presented on buckets nos. 3 and 12 from Hemmoor, on those from Himlingøje and Grabow, while hunting/chase scenes are visible on bucket no. 2 from Hemmoor and the examples from Emmerthal (Börby) and Nijmegen.

The relief frieze on bucket no. 12 from Hemmoor (Ill. 65; Willers 1901, 26, pl. 2: 3; 7: 1) consists of four groups of three animals each. In the first group a deer and doe are fleeing from a hound, while in the others the assailed animal is in the centre of the group: an antelope attacked by two bears, a wild boar and two hounds, and an antelope attacked by a lion and lioness. The background is filled with elements of irregular forms and park pavilions (Willers 1901, 149, 152–153). On bucket no. 3 (Ill. 66) the animals on the frieze form two groups: in the first a lion, horse, stag, and doe are separated by a hound. In the second group a goat is separated from another goat by a large predator (lioness?). The background is filled with rocks, schematic trees, and pavilions (Willers 1901, 149–155).

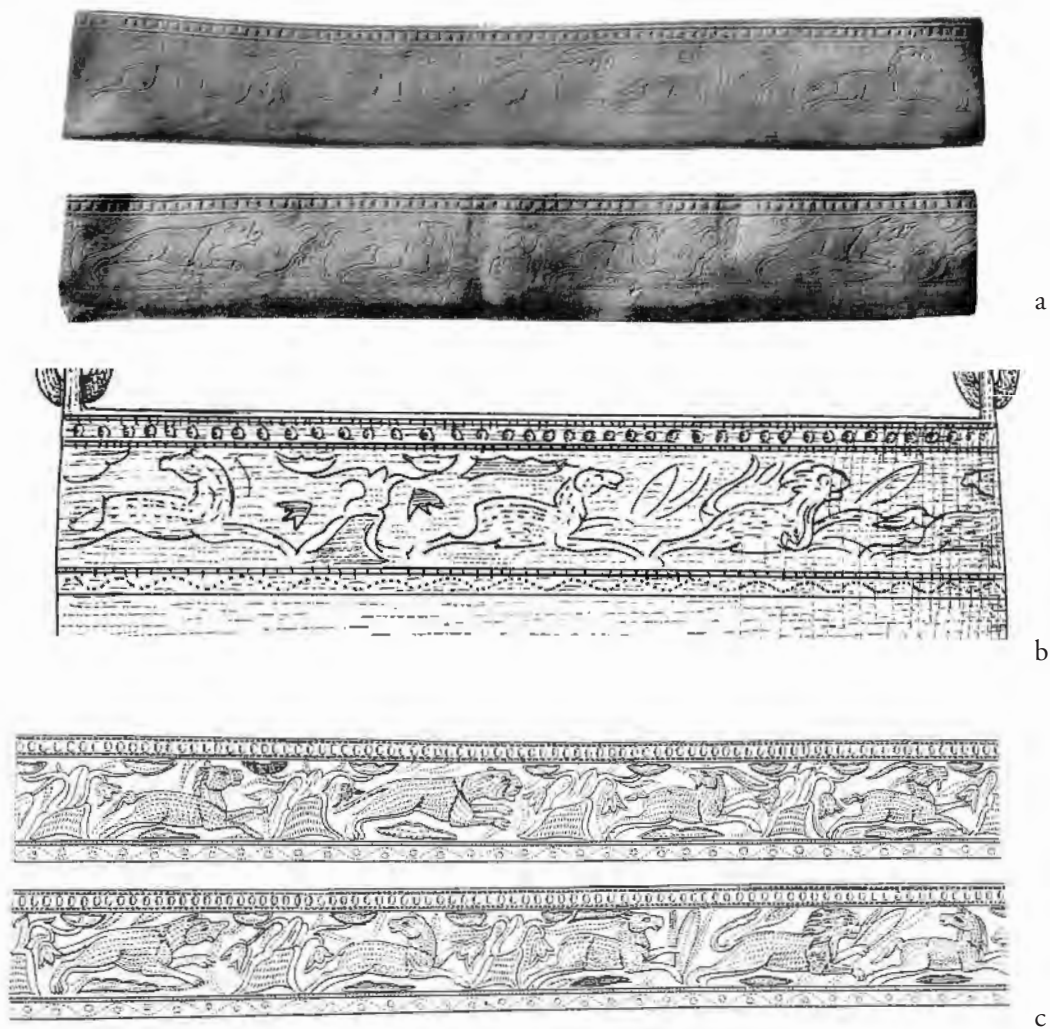


Ill. 65. Frieze on bucket no. 12 from Hemmoor, Germany (Willers 1901, pl. VII: 1)



Ill. 66. Frieze on bucket no. 3 from Hemmoor, Germany (Willers 1901, pl. VII: 2)

The well preserved frieze on the bucket from Himlingøje (Ill. 67; Willers 1901, pl. 8: 1; Lund Hansen 1995, pl. 4: MCMXXXIX) diverges from previous compositions – the deer, the lion chasing two horses, and a panther in pursuit of two capricorns are running in the same direction, following an animal resembling a hound (three of the fleeing animals have turned heads). The background is composed of fantastical trees. The panther's torso is girded, denoting a captive animal, hence the scene is set in a hunting preserve (Willers 1901, 155).



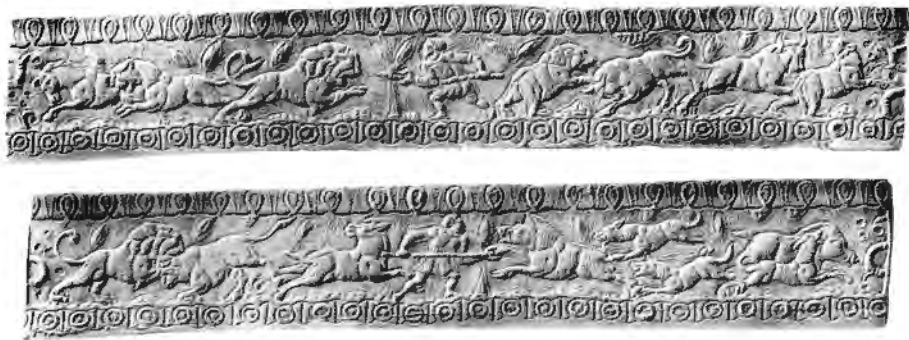
Ill. 67. Frieze on Hemmoor type bucket from Himlingøje, Denmark, grave from 1828 ([a] Willers 1901, pl. VIII: 1; [b] Lund Hansen 1995, pl. 4: MCMXXXIX)

The frieze on the bucket from Himlingøje is very similar to the heavily damaged decoration of the bucket from Grabow (Ill. 68), although not as well made. The animals are presented in groups: first – two hounds chase a horse; second – a lion or panther and two hounds run in opposite directions; third – a face off between lioness and deer; fourth – two bears attack a doe. The background is composed of trees (Willers 1901, 156). The make and content of the friezes on buckets from Himlingøje and Grabow points to them being made at the same workshop, possibly crafted by artisans of different skill levels (see Willers 1901, 156). Only the frieze on bucket no. 12 from Hemmoor was made in relief, all others were engraved.

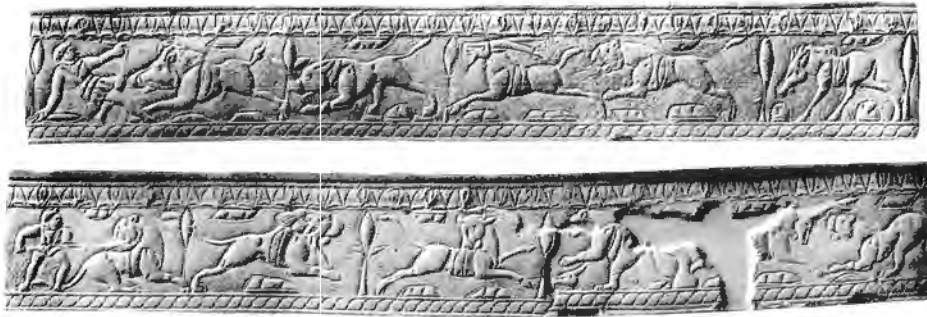


Ill. 68. Frieze on the bucket from Grabow, Germany (Willers 1901, pl. VIII: 2)

A hunt was depicted on the frieze decorating bucket no. 2 from Hemmoor (Ill. 69). The scene in relief shows hunters with spears hiding behind trees. In the central part of the frieze a lion is attacking a spear-armed hunter, while next to him a panther is chasing a horse. On the other side of this scene we have two bears and two bulls, another hunter, a lion, bull, and horse. The background is filled with trees and rocks (Willers 1901, 157–158).



Ill. 69. Frieze on bucket no. 2 from Hemmoor, Germany (Willers 1901, pl. VI: 1)



Ill. 70. Frieze on the bucket from Emmerthal, Börry, Germany (Willers 1901, pl. VI: 2)

The frieze on the bucket from Emmerthal (Börry; Ill. 70) also places two hunters and their prey in the main group. The first hunter attacks a wild boar with a spear, and there are four animals running behind him: a hound, goat, panther, and a difficult to identify beast, while the other hunter is setting a trap for the panther. The animals are separated by trees (Willers 1901, 31, 158, pl. 1: 7; 6: 2).



Ill. 71. Frieze on the Hemmoor type bucket from Nijmegen, Netherlands (Willers 1901, pl. X: 1)

Another frieze with a hunting scene is on the bucket from Nijmegen (Ill. 71; Willers 1901, 70, pl. 10: 1). It shows three larger groups, one smaller, and a lone animal. Every group includes one or two hunters with hounds. In one they are hunting hares, and deer in another. In the fourth scene the hunter catches a goat or antelope. The background is filled with trees (Willers 1901, 70, 159, pl. 10: 1).

The bordiurs framing the friezes on Hemmoor type buckets principally use braiding/plait, a wolf teeth pattern, or cymatium. A wavy line is common, and only single instances of chain ornament, ribbon, and leaf wreath are known. In three friezes with maritime scene the background was decorated with shells. In scenes with game and predators, the space is filled mostly by elements resembling rocks (Willers 1901, 148, pl. 5: 1; 9: 1, 2).

The main similarity between the fitting from Nidajno with friezes on Hemmoor type buckets is the animal-chase motif in linear arrangement, enclosed from top and bottom by a bordiure – a decorated ribbon. Interestingly, the stamped ornament of the lower and upper bordiure on the fitting from Nidajno use different stamps, just as the bordiures on the buckets. The size of the presentations is similar, as is the width of the fitting and the frieze.

The motif on the fitting from Nidajno is highly simplified, even when compared to the simplest friezes (e.g., on buckets from Heddernheim, no. 3 from Hemmoor, or from Grabow), and is reduced to the presentation of the hybrids only, here also more geometric and devoid of background filling elements. This brings the fitting from Nidajno closer to the template used for the – older by over a dozen decades – animal chase presentations on *cingula* fittings. This visually enhanced the role of animals which, in the context of personal military equipment, probably conferred some sort of symbolic meaning. The general effect and reception of both categories of artefacts is doubtlessly affected by the manner of their crafting. The fitting from Nidajno was made with several goldsmithing techniques, ones much more sophisticated than impressing or engraving brass sheets, such as those used for the frieze on buckets.

The choice of animals for the fittings from Nidajno is consistent with the repertoire of zoomorphic presentations appropriate for various types of friezes on provincial Roman vessels. Depictions of actual animals (in park or hunting scenes), such as lions, birds, and fish, were confronted with hybrids known from mythological scenes: a dolphin and capricorn (maritime scenes) and gryphons or a dragon¹⁷. Fittings with presentations of fish and birds are included in this wealth of motifs. Hence it may be assumed that other, yet uncovered fittings from the set at Nidajno would bear depictions of other species or other mythological beasts. This makes the set unique, particularly versus other known sets of fittings of parade military belts from the 3rd century.

Thus it seems more likely that the manner in which the motif of the animal chase was applied to the “five beasts fitting” was more inspired by provincial Roman metal vessels than by contemporary belt or horse harness fittings.

Elements of parade equipment with animal chase motif in the context Barbarian wares

The motif of animal chase also appears on impressed gilded or silver-coated sheet – elements of personal parade equipment crafted at specialized Barbarian workshops.

A design analogous to the fitting from Nidajno was placed on a curved large sheet from the sacrificial bog site at Thorsberg, Kr. Süderbrarup (Germany ; Ill. 72: b), even if the style and craftsman technique of the two are different (see Nowakiewicz, Rzeszotarska-Nowakiewicz 2012, 101; Blankenfeldt 2015a, 270–271, ill. 164). The design on the fitting from Nidajno follows the

¹⁷ The hippocampus from the Nidajno palmetto fitting also belongs to the mythological sea monsters category.

principle of four beasts facing right (a dolphin, capricorn, two gryphons) and one left (a dragon). The arrangement of the sheet from Thorsberg is different: all animals (a hippocampus, capricorn, wild boar, and bird) are moving to the left, even the fifth one¹⁸, whose head is turned and facing backwards (Blankenfeldt 2015a, 257, pl. 56–58; 2015b, 19; further literature there). Hence both artefacts show four creatures facing the fifth, even if with different degree of emphasis. In the sheet from Thorsberg the opposition is reinforced by the smaller presentations – the seven fish and the snakelike creature – accompanying the four beasts; here the animal with a turned head does not have companions. This division is further underscored by the column of three fish, separating the quartet from the fifth creature.



a



b

Ill. 72. a – fitting from Nidajno no. 7 (Photo M. Bogacki); b – curved sheet from sacrificial bog deposit from Thorsberg, Germany (Blankenfeldt 2008, 68)

c



18 The issue as to what animal is depicted has been subject to much debate. It has been variously identified as a tiger, wolf, or hound. Ruth Blankenfeldt, pointing to its claws and characteristic shape of head, is inclined to identify it as a marten or weasel (Blankenfeldt 2015a, 257, ill. 156).

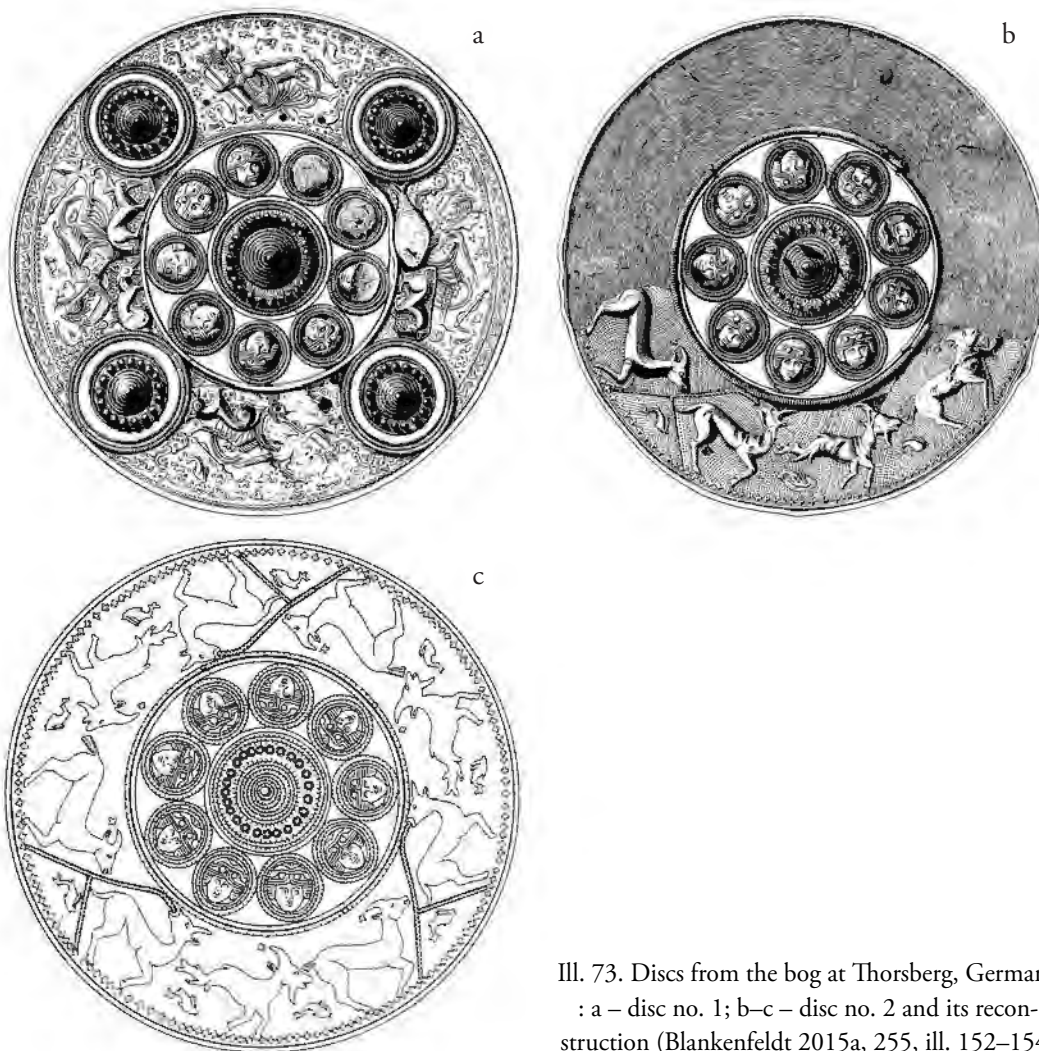
Another find from the sacrificial bog at Thorsberg decorated with the animal chase motif is that of two discs – a complete set of unique objects shaped like small shields with an unidentified function. The fragmentarily preserved zoomorphic frieze on the gilded silver sheet of disc no. 2 originally presented a chase scene with nine animals, divided into three sectors. Each segment held three animals running right (along the edge of the shield). The preserved fragment shows sleek hoofed animals with horns – the one in the centre resembles a capricorn, and the last animal is turning its head (Ill. 73: b–c; Blankenfeldt 2015a, 255, ill. 153, 154; 2015b, 13–14). Disc no. 1 is decorated with a completely different anthropomorphic design, i.e., a four times repeated image of an enthroned individual with a helmet, armour, and *paludamentum*, accompanied by a goose. Due to the characteristic pose and attributes, this is interpreted to be a depiction of Mars. This is accompanied by additional depictions of animals cut out from sheet: ducks, fish, hippocampuses, and two hoofed creatures (Ill. 73: a). On both discs the background is decorated with negatively stamped dolphins (Blankenfeldt 2015a, 254, ill. 152; 2015b, 13–14).

The discs and sheet from Thorsberg are considered to be the work of a Germanic artisan educated in a provincial Roman workshop, or as items made with original Roman tools (e.g., Roman made stamps, as suggested by the image of Mars) in a workshop located between the Rhine and Elbe (Carnap-Bornheim 1997; 2004; Blankenfeldt 2015b, 13–14). All three artefacts are dated to phase C_{1b} (the 1st half of the 3rd century, hoard dated to 220–240), with the reservation that such unique objects cannot be precisely dated and a broader range of dates is also plausible (Blankenfeldt 2015a, 275–277; 2015b, 13, footnote 19; further literature there).

In the context of the animal chase the similarities between the Thorsberg sheet and Herpály boss are highlighted (see Nagy 2007; Przybyła 2018, 567–571). Both items were made using similar techniques and represent the same style. The presentation of the wild boar on the sheet is very close to that of the same animal on the boss and was made in an identical manner (Carnap-Bornheim 1997; 2004; Nagy 2007; Przybyła 2018, 571).

The character of the illustrations on the Herpály boss generally reflect that of the typical frieze depicting an animal chase: the scene is built from pairs of animals facing one another, although not fighting in physical contact (Nagy 2007, 75–76)¹⁹. The zoomorphic designs from Thorsberg and Herpály stem from the same roots, i.e., provincial Roman metal vessels with rims decorated with zoomorphic motifs. Margit Nagy compares the pairs of animals from the boss with the two pairs of animals from the inner frieze on the provincial Roman bowl from Burial I in Wrocław-Zakrzów – at the same time pointing out that they differ greatly in dynamics: the animals on the fittings from Thorsberg and Wrocław-Zakrzów are more static, a quite common feature of imitations (Nagy 2007, 75).

19 Compared to parallels from Jutland, the silhouettes of the animals from Herpály represent a more developed stylistic stage, defined by the innovative manner of eye area presentation, the division of the body, and hinting at the process of stylization and a shift towards the abstract (Nagy 2007, 73–76).



Ill. 73. Discs from the bog at Thorsberg, Germany
 : a – disc no. 1; b–c – disc no. 2 and its reconstruction (Blankenfeldt 2015a, 255, ill. 152–154)

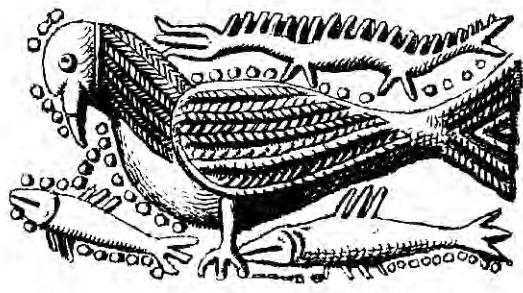
After comparing the fitting from Nidajno with the artefacts from Thorsberg and Herpály, its closer links with provincial Roman products than with Barbarian products become more apparent. With the latter it shares the wealth and breadth of zoomorphic presentations (images of both actual and mythological animals), an argument supporting the theory that it has roots in the same iconographic inspirations. However, the level of artisanal expertise and advanced crafting techniques (compared to working with impressed sheet), along with the higher realism of zoomorphic presentations, testify to the Nidajno fitting's provincial Roman origin.

The “dragon” motif

The first beast from the right on the Nidajno fitting is significantly different than the rest. The lizard-looking creature has a short, massive muzzle rounded at the top, the forward part of its torso is covered with fur, with the rear transforming into a long, downward curled and scale-covered tail. On its neck the creature has a raised “collar” or fin, which then becomes a short, raised dorsal comb running down its entire back. The creature has a pair of short frontal legs. The eye is made with a double circle stamp (just as on many of the other presentations), and the highly placed nostril with a lens-shaped stamp. The upper and lower teeth in the slightly opened jaw are marked with zig-zag lines (Ill. 74: a). This unique, yet stylistically consistent with other Nidajno presentations, beast was tentatively classified as a two-legged dragon – a wyvern (see Nowakiewicz, Rzeszotarska-Nowakiewicz 2012, 73–74, ill. 63).



a



b



c

Ill. 74. a – the dragon from Nidajno, detail of fitting no. 7 (Photo M. Bogacki); b – a beast (*wyrm?*) above the bird on the sheet from Thorsberg, Germany (Pesch 2017, 260, ill. 21); c – a hybrid from the shield-boss from Herpály, Hungary (Fettich 1930, pl. XIV)

When casting around for analogies, once again we turn to the finds from Thorsberg and Herpály. As already mentioned, the five beasts from Thorsberg are accompanied by depictions of smaller creatures. Above the bird of prey we see a small creature with reptilian features, somewhat snakelike: a raised (maybe finned?) back²⁰, a split “tail” (?) on the right, a three-part “maw” (?) on the left²¹, and two pairs of schematically depicted limbs (Ill. 74: b). This image shows neither

²⁰ Fish fins were always depicted in the same manner, preserving their realistic proportions.

²¹ Neither the “tail” nor “head” possess any features allowing such unquestionable identification, these

a real animal nor a hybrid as known from ancient presentations – it is identified as a dragon (with the reservation that Germanic depictions of such beasts were very uncommon in the 3rd century; Blankenfeldt 2008, 68, ill. 1: 5.1; 2015a; 2015b; Pesch 2017, 259–261). The creature on the Herpály shield-boss is likewise assigned, as it has a similar snake-like body with emphasized jaw and tail as well as a dorsal comb (Ill. 74: c; Blankenfeldt 2015b, 26–27; Przybyła 2018).

Identification of dragons on wares from the first centuries after Christ is difficult, as no definite criteria for them exist. Pliny the Elder describes dragons as the largest of all snakes, with a dorsal comb, and which strike opponents with their tail (*Historia Naturalis* VIII). Germanic art is full of depictions of creatures resembling snakes, lizards, or dragons, but most are difficult to classify with certainty – it seems that the imaginarium had them as examples of fantastical combinations of various features. Alexandra Pesch suggests a single term for all such similar creatures (from snakes through lizards to large dragon): *wyrm*. She holds that such a term would encompass all legless and quadruped snake- or lizard-like beasts (Pesch 2017, 254–257). Thus the definition of *wyrm* would include the presentations from the sheet from Thorsberg or shield-boss from Herpály, artefacts which combine forms characteristic of the horizon intermediate between Roman character wares tradition and products in Germanic style. In this horizon Roman (provincial Roman) ideas mixed with older Germanic-Celtic concepts and patterns, giving rise to a new lexicon of zoomorphic motifs characteristic for the northern zone of the *Barbaricum* (Pesch 2017, 259–261; 2018). Yet the presentation of the dragon from Nidajno is evidently distinct from the depictions of *wyrms* from Thorsberg or Herpály. Finding its direct iconographic equivalent in Roman iconography poses some difficulty, yet there is a category of presentations which seems to be convergent – the Roman *draco*.

The sole complete *draco* – the main element of a standard shaped like a flying dragon – was discovered along the *limes*, in the *vicus* of the Roman fortress at Niederbieber (Germany), and dated to the 3rd century AD. It takes the form of a dragon's head some 30 × 12 × 12 cm in size, without ears, but covered in scales and with a short, zig-zag topped comb. It was crafted from two combined, embossed copper alloy sheets. The upper sheet (gilded) was placed on top of the lower, tin-coated one, the two pieces then joined with five rivets. At the base of the neck the sheets form a round collar, held together by more rivets. The jaw (i.e., upper jaw, from nostrils to eyes) is covered with deep furrows, transitioning into scales covering the rest of the head and neck. The half-open jaw sports triangular teeth, cut out in the sheet. The head was fastened to a shaft attached from below (Ill. 75: a–c; Garbsch 1978, 15; Junkelmann 1996; 2008; Töpfer 2011, 33–34, pl. 143: AR 16). To this metal head a “body” – or “wind-sleeve” – from rectangular pieces of cloth with corners sewn together was attached, imitating scales on the dragon's body inflated by the wind (Arrian, *Ars. Tact.* 35.3–4).

terms being used in light of the design's arrangement (i.e., the direction in which the other depicted beasts are facing).



Ill. 75. Head of the *draco* from Niederbieber, Germany: a–c – silver-coated bronze sheet from Landesmuseum Koblenz, original and reconstruction ([a]Garbsch 1978, pl. 48; [b] Töpfer 2011, pl. 143: AR16; [c] Junkelmann 1996); d – one of the twenty *draco* on Trajan’s Column (Photo R. Oltean, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Dacian_Draco_on_Trajan%27s_Column_2.jpg, accessed on: 9.12.2021); e – reconstruction of mounted warrior from *Carnuntum*, Austria (Junkelmann 1996, ill. 18)



In 357 AD Ammianus Marcellinus described such a standard: “The Emperor was surrounded by dragon symbols weaved from purple thread, attached to the tips of gilded spears decorated with precious stones. They puffed up with widely stretched jaws and hissed as if in anger, their tails waving in the wind” (Amm. Marc. 15.5.16, 16.10.7, 16.12.39). I wish to draw attention to the word “hissing” used by Ammianus: it is likely that when held aloft by a mounted standard bearer, the construction of the dragon allowed it to make some sort of sound. Its fluttering, hissing (possibly a whistling sound) could have been a symbolic dialogue with the army, influencing – like so many other intangible yet known from history phenomena – its morale.

Originally *draco* had probably been used by *numeri* (units of Roman auxiliaries) and adopted by Romans sometime in the late 1st or 2nd century, alongside the introduction of Sarmatian cavalry, most likely during the Dacian wars (or shortly after). This brought heavily armoured cavalry armed with long lances into the Roman army (*equites cataphractarii*; Coulston 1991, 101–111; 2013, 466–467; Töpfer 2011, 33–35). Around 137 AD Arrian described the *draco* as a Scythian (which probably meant Sarmatian) invention, adopted by the Roman military and initially used in cavalry exercises or *hippica gymnasia* (*Ars Tactica* 35). The historian considered these to be glorified training sessions, performed in parade dress by units equipped with such standards. The

choice of a dragon form for a military standard was probably influenced by the predominance of Thracians and Sarmatians²² among mounted Roman troops.

The use of a *draco* as a battle standard by Barbarians is attested for Dacians who, identically like the Romans, adopted it from Sarmatians and Alans (this motif is seen 27 times on Trajan's Column, mostly in the context of *spolia* or as illustration of Dacians lined up for battle)²³. Further evidence for its use is the presence of *draco* among Barbarian *spolia* on the pillars from Galeria Uffizi in Florence, dated to the Flavian period (69–96)²⁴, on the reliefs from Hadrianeum (145; Ill. 77: a), and from 3rd century *congeries armorum* – heaps of piled up weaponry taken from vanquished foes (Coulston 1991, 101–102, 111; 2003, 430, ill. 10; 2013, 466–467; Töpfer 2011, 35).

The use of *draco* by mounted Roman troops is shown by battle scenes on sarcophagi from Portonaccio (c. 180) and Ludovisi (c. 250–260.; Ill. 76; Coulston 1991, 101–102; 2013, 466–467; Töpfer 2011, 33–35, 153, pl. 48: 12.3; 106; 114). The head of the *draco* from the sarcophagus from Ludovisi is closest in appearance to the metal *draco* head from Niederbieber: it is scale covered, topped with a comb, and the half open maw shows teeth. The dating of the two artefacts is similar as well.

In the reign of Gallienus (253–268) the Roman army included *draco* among its various standards, and a few years later the presence of foot draco bearers – *draconarii* – in Aurelian's infantry is attested (270–275). Not much later images of *draco* appear on Roman triumphal arches: the Galerius Arch in Salonika (before 311 AD, Ill. 77: e) and on Constantine's Arch in Rome (312–315, Ill. 77: f; Coulston 2013, 467). *Draco* also may be found on objects made to order of private individuals: of particular note here is the 2–3rd century grave stella from Chester in the United Kingdom (*Deva Victrix*) with the presentation of a Sarmatian draconarius (Ill. 77: b–c). After

22 A few sources mention the use of the *draco* by Parthians as well. The sole iconographic source confirming this is the Septimius Sever arch in Rome (203 AD). One of the panels commemorates his victory over the Parthians (195, 197–199) and a *draco* is shown in the scene of the surrender of Edessa. Its use by Parthians is mentioned by Lucian (*De historia conscribenda* 29) in the context of a story from the early 160s and in the *Scriptores Historiae Augustae* (*Aurel.; Flavi Vopisci Syracusii* 28.5), in a fragment concerning a situation in the early 270s (see Marciniak 2010, 49–51).

23 The dragon motif, even if in slightly different form, had a long history in Dacian territories. It decorated items of special value: massive, multi-coiled, gold and silver bracelets with ends decorated with “winged dragon” heads. These belong to typical fashion accessories typical of the classic period of Dacian culture (1st century BC - 1st century AD), preceding Romanization. Silver and gilded examples of this type had been discovered in Romania, north-east Serbia, north Bulgaria and in Ukraine (Deppert-Lippitz 2008, 235; 2013, 137–150; Oberländer-Târnoveanu 2014). The list includes e.g., Bracelets from Romanian votive deposits from 1st century BC at Coada Malului (jud. Prahova) and Senereuş (jud. Mureş) plus from the unique assemblage of five hoards from the vicinity of the temple in the Dacian capital *Sarmizegetusa Regia* (discovered in 1999–2001), including at least 24 massive, golden bracelets with ends decorated with dragon heads (Oberländer-Târnoveanu 2014).

24 The depicted beasts are interpreted also as “water serpents” – a motif inspired by the presentation on the *Ara Pacis* of Octavian Augustus (9 AD; Marciniak 2010, 27–29).

their defeat by the Romans in 175 AD units formed from Sarmatian riders – now in Roman service – were deployed to Britannia, some being used as heavy cavalry formations (*Cuneus Sarmatarum*). The stela probably commemorates one those Sarmatian warriors ²⁵, and also attests to the percolation of the *draco* motif to Britannia (Coulston 1991, 102, ill. 9–11; Töpfer 2011, pl. 107: SD 55; 114). The *draco* also appears, although not as often, on mobile artefacts: an example may be a bronze sheet from the cemetery at Ságvár (Hungary), probably the lid of a wooden box, dated to the 4th century. It is decorated with a scene showing e.g., two *draco* standards carried by an infantry formation (Ill. 77: d; Coulston 1991, 105, 109; 2013, 467). In the 4th century the *draco* become the standard of a cohort (Vegetius, *Epitoma rei militaris* 2.13) – with the eagle remaining the legion’s banner. The use of personal *draco* (from purple cloth) by Emperors Constantius II and Julian Apostate is attested for 357 AD²⁶ (Amm. Marc. 20.4.18; Coulston 2013, 466–467).



Ill. 76. *Draco* used by Roman cavalry: a – on sarcophagus from Portonaccio, Italy, c. 180 AD, Museo Nazionale Romano in Rome collection (Photo J.-P. Grandmont, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:0_Sarcophage_de_Portonaccio_\(PMT_240\)_-_Palazzo_Museo_Massimo_\(1\).JPG](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:0_Sarcophage_de_Portonaccio_(PMT_240)_-_Palazzo_Museo_Massimo_(1).JPG), accessed on: 9.12.2021); b – on Ludovisi sarcophagus, c. 250–260 AD (Pgoto Jastrow, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Grande_Ludovisi_Altemps_Inv8574.jpg, accessed on: 9.12.2021)

25 Although according to e.g., Lucrețiu Mihailescu-Bîrlibî this just as well could had been a Dacian. This theory is supported by the Dacian character of the *draco* presentation, by the finds of military diplomas at Chester which mention soldiers of Dacian origin, and soldiers’ gravestones with Dacian names (Mihailescu-Bîrlibî 2009, 151–154).

26 A *draco* then became a standard held aloft near the Emperor, making him easier to locate during battle (Amm. Marc. 16.12.39). The text highlights the imperial purple colour of the wind-sleeve, i.e., the dragon’s “body” (Nemesianus, *Cynegetica* 84–85; Amm. Marc. 15.5.16, 16.10.7, 16.12.39; Klaudian, *In Rufinum* 184–186).



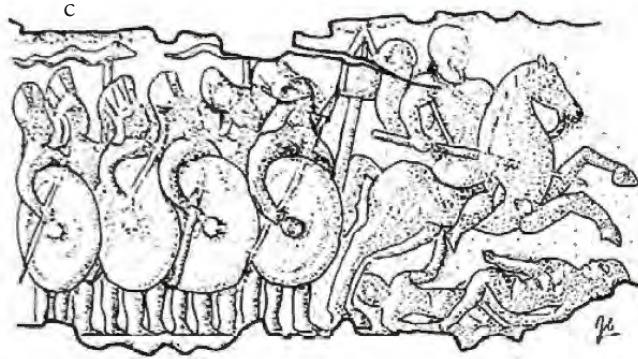
a



b



c



d



e



f

Ill. 77. a – Dacian *draco* among *spolia* on relief from Hadrianeum in Rome, 145 AD, Capitolini Museum (Photo C. Chirita, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Dacian_Draco_Capitolini_Museum_IMG_6304.jpg, accessed on: 9.12.2021); b–c – Roman gravestone with depiction of Sarmatian trooper from *Deva Victrix* / Chester, United Kingdom, and its reconstruction (© The Grosvenor Museum); d – plaque from Ságvár, Hungary (Coulston 1991, ill. 11); e – Roman Army *dracones* on Galerius Arch (311 AD) in Salonika, Greece; f – Roman Army *dracones* on Constantine Arch in Rome (312–315) (https://www.bbc.co.uk/history/ancient/romans/romanarmy_gallery_06.shtml, accessed on: 9.12.2021)

That this motif became well ingrained in the Roman military context is attested by another written source, and which also has enormous iconographic value. This is a document referring to the state of affairs from the turn of the 4th and 5th centuries, although it was written down a bit later, the *Notitia dignitatum omnium, tam civilium quam militarium* (“Register of dignitaries ...”), with a detailed list of civilian and military positions in the East and West of the Empire²⁷. Its richly illuminated pages present e.g., unit identification marks used on shields of Roman military formations posted to the Diocese of Gaul and Africa. A *draco* motif appears in nine variants among all the 283 patterns of markings (Zuckerman 2001; Marciniak 2010, 70–72).

To conclude, it is worth noting that in Roman iconography *draco* are presented as dragons whose heads possess snake or wolf-like features. The “wolf-like” *draco* are mostly seen among the oldest presentations, as elements of Barbarian spolia. As a rule, the “snake-like” *draco*, scale covered, with comb and triangular teeth, appear as Roman standards, although such a context becomes crystal-clear only in the early 3rd century (Coulston 1991; Marciniak 2010, 157–158; Töpfer 2011, 34–35, 153).

In the context of our analysis one may say that the dragon from Nidajno definitely has more in common with a 3rd-century Roman *draco* than with Germanic *wyrms*. The distinctive features here are the long tail, dorsal comb, sharp triangular teeth, lack of ears, and the body being partly scale covered. There is room for doubt whether the creature might have been derived from the Roman motif of a “water snake” or other sea monster, yet it is clearly different from Roman presentations of such aquatic beasts. On the fitting from Nidajno the accompanying real and fantastical beasts all are related with the elements of water – the dolphin or capricorn, or air – the gryphons, all being ingrained in Roman military symbology. Such an association is reinforced by Roman connotations of other motifs from the Nidajno assemblage and its parade, military character.

²⁷ The contents of the document survived in 15-16th century copies of a 10th century document, supposedly a copy of the original. It is assumed that in the eastern part of the Empire the tally was completed c. 400 AD, and in the west around 420/428 AD (Zuckerman 2001).

5.3. Fittings with zoomorphic presentations

Besides the two large fittings (nos. 7 and 8) with composite motifs combining various elements, the Nidajno assemblage includes smaller fittings with presentations of a single (nos. 1–3, 9) or two animals (no. 4).

Motif of lions

Depictions of lions appear on three belt fittings from Nidajno. The rectangular fitting (no. 3) has a single lion facing right (Ill. 78: a). On the long rectangular ferrule of the ornamented buckle (no. 1) a lion with an obviously emphasized large mane is facing left (Ill. 78: b). On the heavily damaged fitting (no. 4) a lion in analogous orientation (left) is accompanied by a bird, shown behind the ferrule. In spite of the worn-down lines the lush mane is visible (Ill. 78: c). It seems that the first fitting presents a lioness as, in contrast to the other examples, it has a vestigial mane and a more slender snout – although this being a depiction of a young male is also a possibility. In presentations of the males the impressive mane makes their head look disproportionately large in relation to the body.

An analogous depiction of a lion, although made with a different technique, decorated the openwork strap divider (no. 10). Owing to extensive mechanical (chopping) and heat (melting) damage, only fragments of the animal have been preserved²⁸. The proportions of the body and manner of presenting details of fur, tail and paws are, however, consistent with those of presentations of lions on the fittings and ferrule, hence it is reasonable to classify the animal as a lion. Originally the central depiction of the lion was attached to vines and – through them – to the circular frame (Ill. 78: d). The principal formal feature of the artefact – an openwork, zoomorphic presentation inside an oval – places it in close association with other openwork elements of bridles and horse harnesses from the 3rd-century, Roman military context. Examples of these are the above-mentioned elements of headstall decorated with an animal chase motif from Burgos (Spain; Ill. 58: b), the saddle-straps divider from Celles (Belgium), and an analogous example from the collections of the Kunsthistorisches Museum in Vienna (Lau 2014a, 173, ill. 111: 1–2).

²⁸ The artefact was reconstructed from seven fragments. Sadly the head still has not been discovered (it is possible that it was destroyed, and that one of the few, small amorphous splatters of precious metal unearthed from Nidajno sediment is its remnant).



Ill. 78. Fittings from Nidajno with presentations of lions: a – fitting no. 3; b – fitting no. 1; c – fitting no. 4; d – strap divider no. 10; e – detail of gold fitting of sword scabbard neck no. 11 (Photo M. Osiadacz [a, b, d], M. Bogacki [c, e])

The four lion presentations on the gold fitting of sword scabbard neck no. 11 are slightly different. The lions, arranged in two pairs facing right, are exceptionally detailed and probably were made with a single stamp (Ill. 78: e). These were subsequently soldered to the gold sheet of the fitting. The images are realistic, with sharp contours and finely made details. Indeed they exhibit the highest class of craftsmanship, and doubtlessly hail from Classic (Roman) cultural milieu. Compared to these depictions, the other presentations of lions on leather strap fittings are simplified and schematic, although somewhat more dynamic due to having raised tails and the left front paw placed slightly forward. The technique was different as well – on one hand, a three dimensional relief in gold, with engraved and stamped flat images on the other. This is yet another piece of evidence pointing towards the leather belt fittings and the sword fittings not having been designed as a single set.

The lion motif has a long tradition in Mediterranean art and is one of the most popular zoomorphic presentations in iconography and ornament – and not only among Greeks or Romans (Ill. 79). It is used on its own or as an element of scenes (animal chase, hunting, mythological scenes, etc.) on objects making part of a broad spectrum of symbols of power, splendour, or strength (Ill. 80).



Ill. 79. a – golden buckle with presentations of a pegasus and lions, 4rd century BC, Ukraine; b – fragment of buckle, 1st or 2nd century AD (Ukraina Światu 2008, ill. 4.97, 4.109); c – silver fitting of bridle strap dated to the 4th quarter of the 4th century - 1st half of the 5th century AD, discovered in 1904 at Kerch, Ukraine (Макаров, Плетнев eds. 2003, 32, pl. 14: 59)



Ill. 80. a – Roman gemma with lion (© The Trustees of the British Museum; https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/G_1987-0212-284; accessed on: 26.09.2019); b – an *aureus* of Emperor Caracalla (197–217; <https://www.numisbids.com/n.php?p=lot&sid=2776&lot=259>; accessed on: 30.09.2021); c – an *aureus* of Emperor Lucius Domitius Aurelianus (272; <https://www.numisbids.com/n.php?p=lot&sid=1979&lot=32>; accessed on: 30.09.2021); d – fragment of a Roman patrix used to make a frieze on metal vessels from Katendrecht, Rotterdam, Netherlands; e – lioness from the bowl from Wrocław-Zakrzów, burial I (Quast 2016, ill. 6); f – Fitting from Nidajno no. 3 (Photo M. Osiadacz)

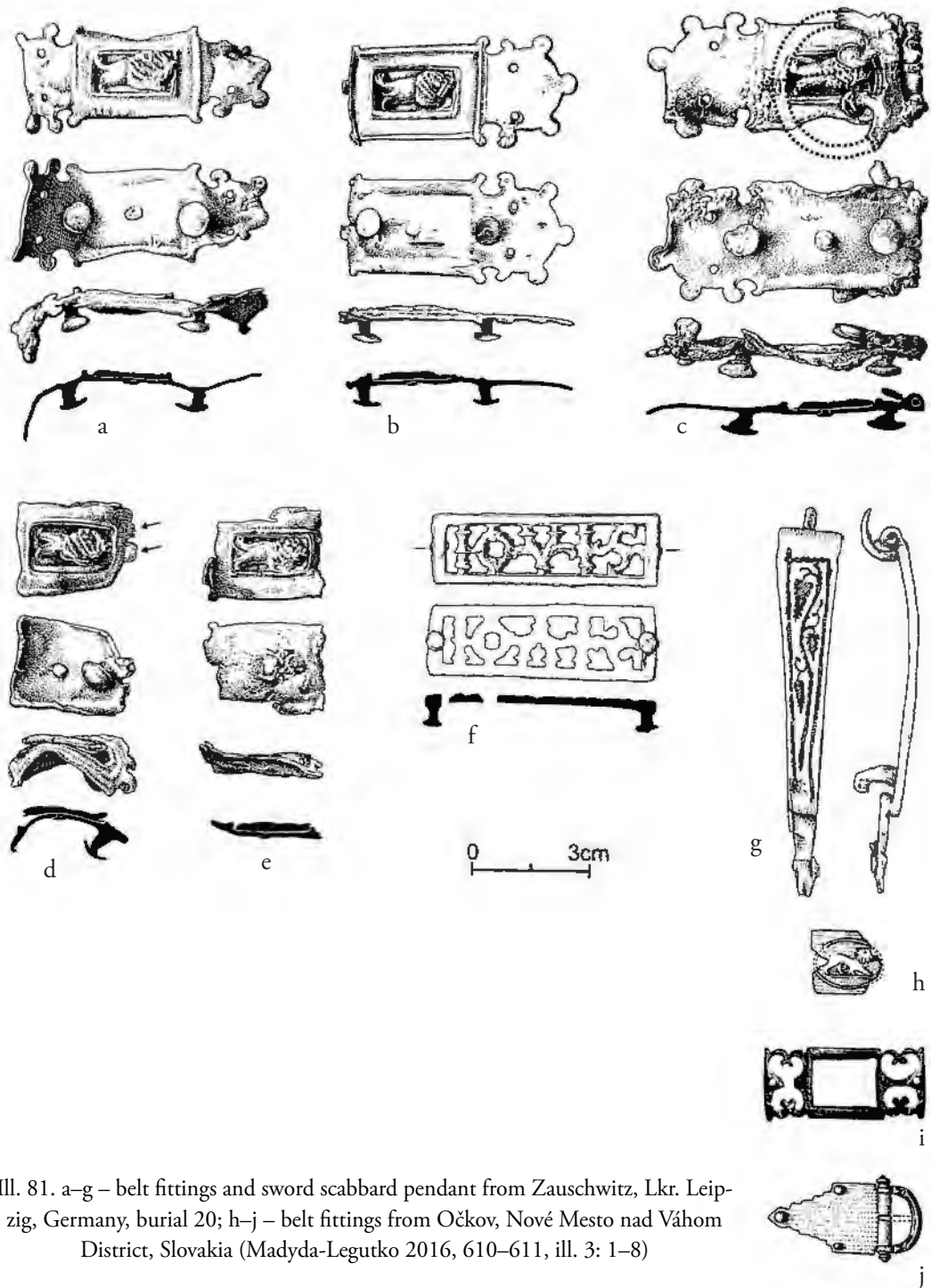
The manner of presenting the lioness and lions on fittings from the Nidajno assemblage falls inside the canon of Roman art and is similar to depictions of such animals on the friezes of provincial Roman metal vessels (the similarity is further strengthened by the flatness of the engraved and stamped patterns). An example may be the girded lioness on the bowl from Wrocław-Zakrzów (Grempler 1887, 9, pl. IV: 6) with a similar outline and proportions of body, although with a different manner of finish (Ill. 80: e). The use of lions on Roman military belt fittings was rare. An example of such artefacts from the *Barbaricum* is a set of five belt fittings cast in bronze from burial 20 at the cemetery at Zauschwitz, Lkr. Leipzig (Germany), decorated with a right-facing lion motif (background probably enamel filled), dated to phase C₁ (Ill. 81: a–g; Madyda-Legutko 2016, 609–611, ill. 3: 1–5). Burial 117 at the Quidian cemetery at Očkov, Nové Mesto nad Váhom District (Slovakia), provided three elements of a belt, one of which was decorated with the depiction of a lion facing right inside an ellipsoidal frame²⁹. These fittings also are dated to phase C₁ (Ill. 81: h–j; Madyda-Legutko 2016, 610–611, ill. 3: 8).

The motif of a lion is very rare on products from the European *Barbaricum*. It was recorded on embossed gold foil from a belt fitting from Ejsbøl-Vest, Haderslev Amt (Denmark), and on fittings from burials nos. 3 and 7 at Neudorf-Bornstein, Kr. Rendsburg-Eckernförde (Germany), dated to phase C₂ (Ill. 82: a; Przybyła 2018, 479–483, 567, ill. 15/46, 16/47: 1–3). Presentations of lions also appear on the impressed facings of the above-mentioned boss from Herpály (Ill. 82: b–c). Zoomorphic decorations of products from Roman workshops, especially those along the Danube (Carnap-Bornheim 2003, 243, 245), are regarded as being the original inspiration for these barbarized presentations. Another possible source of inspiration may be Roman imports with hunting motifs, like Hemmoor type buckets, glass chalices of type Eggers 209, or *terra sigillata* vessels (Przybyła 2018, 567), as well as the already mentioned Roman belts with lion motif (Madyda-Legutko 2016; Przybyła 2018, 567). The Barbarian imitations demonstrate evident geometricization and simplification of the depictions, setting them apart from Roman originals (see Nagy 2007).

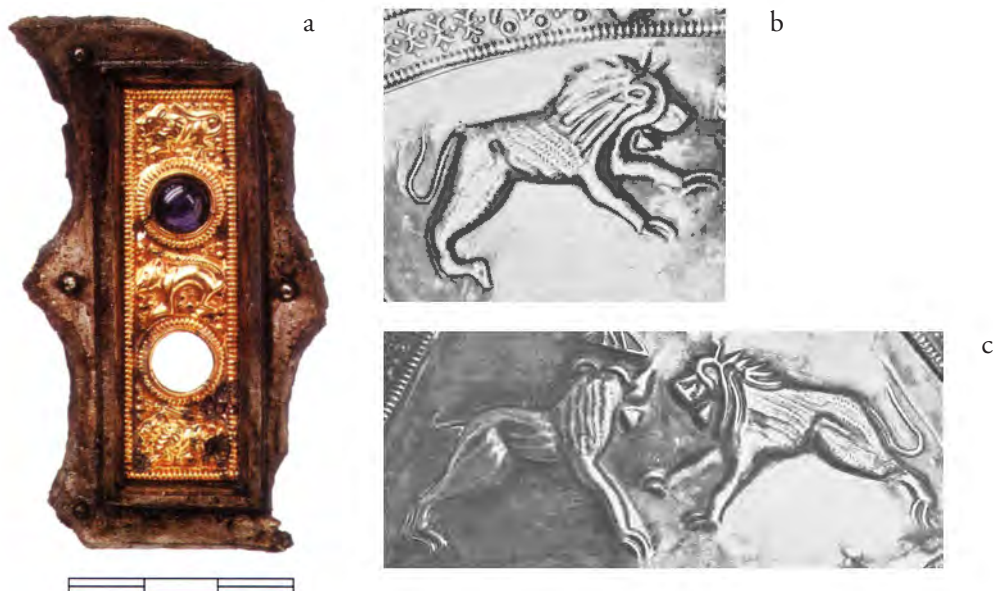
The presentations of lions on the set of fittings from Nidajno display strong similarities with their depictions on provincial Roman wares, particularly metal vessels decorated with a frieze made by engraving and stamping³⁰. The domination of this motif in the set may point to it being the main element of the symbolic message of the iconographic content of the entire set – something which at the present state of research cannot be affirmed with certainty.

29 In her classification, Stefanie Hoss distinguished the four sided fittings “with a lion in a profiled field” as type B.16 (otherwise “type Zauschwitz”). Such fittings had also been discovered in the ruins of a large *villa rustica* at Liberchies, near Charleroi (Belgium), on the *principia* of the Roman fort *Trimontium* in Newstead (Scotland, UK) and in the Roman *Volubilis* (Morocco; two examples). On all known specimens of type Zauschwitz the lions have their heads turned right. Hoss dates them to the turn of the 2/3rd centuries (Hoss 2014, 161–162, pl. 50: B.1171–B.1179).

30 The difference between them is the design element, one of the defining features of the set from Nidajno: all lions from Nidajno have their tails raised, similarly to part of the presentation from gemmae and Roman coins and a few products from specialized Barbarian workshops.



Ill. 81. a–g – belt fittings and sword scabbard pendant from Zauschwitz, Lkr. Leipzig, Germany, burial 20; h–j – belt fittings from Očkov, Nové Mesto nad Váhom District, Slovakia (Madyda-Legutko 2016, 610–611, ill. 3: 1–8)



Ill. 82. a – golden foil from belt fittings from Neudorf-Bornstein, Germany, burial 7 (Przybyła 2018, ill. 16/47: 2); b–c – depictions of lions on shield-boss from Herpály, Hungary (Fettich 1930, pl. XIV)

Fish motif

The motif of a fish is used on a fitting which probably served as a belt pendant or leather strap link. The fish is facing right and is gold coated (Ill. 83). This presentation is in line with those of other depictions of aquatic creatures on Nidajno fittings: dolphin, capricorn (the *five beasts* fitting) and hippocampus (palmetto fitting). Similarities are also apparent at the craftsmanship level: the rear parts of the fish and the hippocampus are presented in an identical manner.

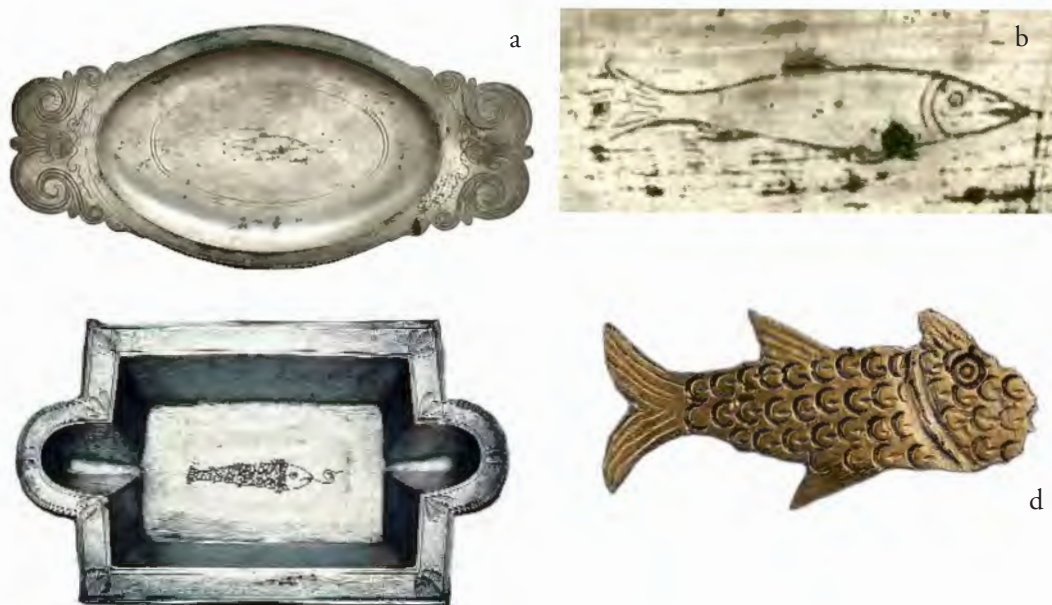


Ill. 83. Fitting from Nidajno (no. 9) with a fish presentation (Photo M. Osiadacz)

On decorations of Roman items it is quite rare to see single fish. This animal usually is used as an element of figural arrangements and scenes on mosaics or wall paintings, often sepulchral, alongside presentations of other animals and plants, all combining into a symbolic depiction of a garden of paradise (e.g., the grave in Brestovik, Serbia, from the early 4th century). Such combinations are typical of decorations on “civilian” items where they are usually an element of aquatic themed scenes. A single fish as a leitmotif appears on a bronze, silver-coated serving platter type Eggers 121 (ND 22 acc. S. Künzl; Ill. 84: a–b) of unknown origin, currently part of The Metropolitan Museum of Art collection. The image engraved into the centre of the bottom is marked with a contour (including flat dorsal and ventral fins) and with no scales. It should be noted that the manner in which the tail is emphasized is similar to the presentation from Nidajno, regarding the separation of the head from the body by engraved lines – and the eye made with a circular stamp. The silver serving plate from hoard no. II from the Roman *Augusta Raurica* (Augst, Switzerland; Ill. 84: c), deposited in the 2nd quarter of the 4th century (330–350) was decorated in an analogous manner, although here the fish has scales. Depictions of fish on such vessels in antiquity are interpreted as an expression of wealth and a happy life – in antiquity a universally held symbolism (Rütti, Aitken 2003, 47, ill. 50; Guggisberg red. 2003, pl. 1: 53). Fish also make an integral part of the multifaceted ornamentation decorating silver Roman vessels, like the bowl from the hoard of Muncelu de Sus, Jassy District (Romania), from the 2nd–3rd century AD, with presentation of water fowl and baskets of fish (Ill. 94; Aurul și Argintul 2014, 530, ill. 142.1.1). Another example may be a plate with a central medallion depicting an underwater city from hoard no. II from *Augusta Raurica* (Ill. 85: a; Guggisberg red. 2003, pl. 1: 62). Such vessels are rarely recorded in archaeological material, their decorations often highly individualized.

The fish motif is also known from Roman provincial votive plaques, related with the cult of the Danubian or Thracian Rider, popular among Roman soldiers and veterans in Roman provinces such as Thracia and Moesia Superior and Inferior. An example may be an *aedicula* shaped plaque, dated to the 3rd century, cast in lead, where the tympanum crowning the main iconographic element features two fish with heads turned towards a crescent³¹ (Gavrilović-Vitas, Pop-Lazić 2018, 375). An analogous plaque from Pannonia, also dated to the 3rd century, has snakes instead of fish (Ill. 85: c) – in ancient religions both animal types were associated with the element of water. The exact symbolic meaning of the fish in this design is not clear, yet their high stature – implied by prominent placement – is evident.

31 The main segment of the presentation is divided into three sections. In the upper, the busts of the deities Sol and Luna, accompanying the eagle, are surrounded by snakes, with seven stars around them. In the central part a female figure in chiton is sided by two riders with labryses in their hands, and with a human body beneath each. Beneath the female figure we have another fish. Behind each of the riders a female figure is holding a wreath. In the bottom section, from right to left, we see presentations of sacrificial vessels, a lion, tripod, cock, bull, and below them – three lamps and three bowls (Gavrilović-Vitas, Pop-Lazić 2018, 375).

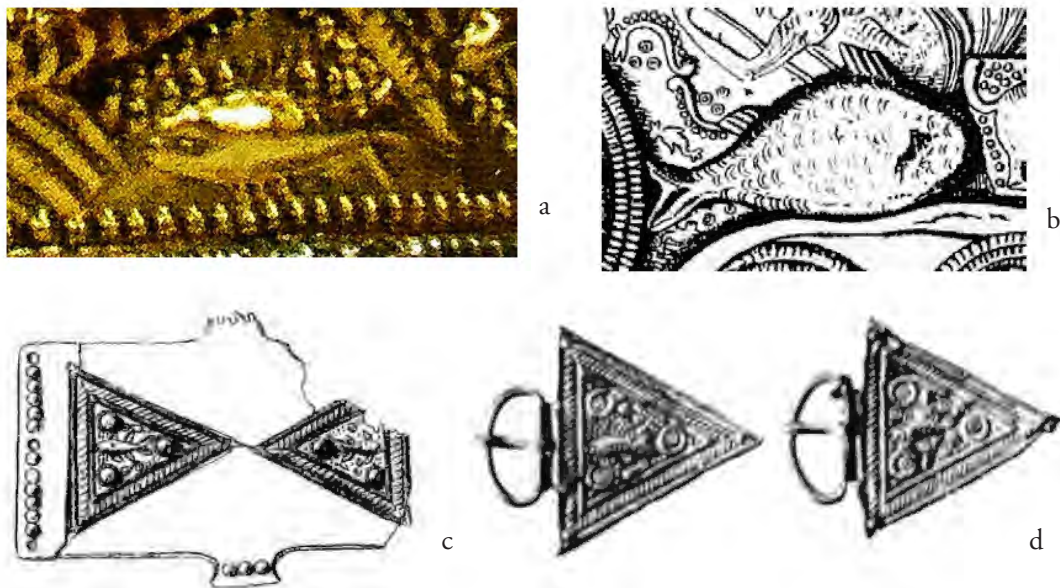


Ill. 84. a–b – type Eggers 121 vessel decorated with fish motif, detail (The Metropolitan Museum of Art collection; <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/468192>; accessed on: 9.12.2020); c – silver vessel from hoard no. II, *Augusta Raurica* / Augst, Switzerland (Rütti, Aitken 2003, ill. 50); d – Fitting from Nidajno no. 9, detail (Photo M. Osiadacz)



Ill. 85. a – medallion decorating a plate from hoard no. II from *Augusta Raurica* / Augst, Switzerland (Photo H. Widmer, <https://www.augustaurica.ch/besuchen/silberschatz#>, accessed on: 9.12.2021); b – lead votive plaque from *Singidunum* / Belgrade, Serbia, associated with the cult of the Danubian Rider (Gavrilović-Vitas, Pop-Lazić 2018, 375); c – lead votive plaque from Pannonia, Hungary (Garam ed. 2005, no. 73)

Fish presentations also appear on Germanic personal effects, inspired by Roman crafts, e.g., the small disc no. 1 and large sheet from Thorsberg (Ill. 86: a–b). As to the former, the fish were applied to the main sheet (as extra applications) and possess clearly defined scales (Blankenfeldt 2015a), while on the latter the fish are repeated and made in small scale, taking second stage to the main presentation. The motif of a single fish may also be seen on both gold foils of triangular ferrules of buckles and on the four triangular appliques of the parade belt fitting from Wrocław-Zakrzów, burial I (Ill. 86: c; Grempler 1887, 12, pl. V:12c, V: 15–16; Przybyła 2005, 107–108, ill. 1b, 2a–b, 4a–b; 2018, 556). All these depictions are more stylized and less precisely made than the presentations from Nidajno.



Ill. 86. a – large sheet from Thorsberg, Germany, detail; b – small disc no. 1 from Thorsberg, Germany, detail (Blankenfeldt 2015a, pl. 56, ill. 152); c – belt fittings from Wrocław-Zakrzów, burial I (Przybyła 2005, ill. 1: a–b, 4: a–b)

Motif – birds

Bird presentations are an integral element of the bestiary used for parade equipment from Nidajno, this motif being used on: two buckles with pairs of bird heads (no. 1, 2), the fragmentarily preserved fitting with bird tail (no. 5), the fitting with depictions of a lion and bird (no. 4), and on the palmetto (five pairs of bird heads; no. 8). Bird figures are used in decorations of the gold fitting of the sword scabbard neck and cross-guard. The silver, gilded figurine is a unique presentation of a bird.

The fragmentarily preserved fitting with the depiction of at least one animal (no. 5)³² alone preserved a quite long, slightly lowered, tri-part tail with feathers marked with oblique hatching (Ill. 87), originally making part of a bird's presentation. In this case an absolutely certain identification of species is not possible, but examination of various examples of antique presentations shows that such tails were principally used in two instances: on the less commonly depicted exotic birds, and – ubiquitous in Roman and Byzantine art – peacocks. It seems that the tail of this bird from Nidajno may have originally been part of a depiction of a peacock (regardless of depiction style, a long tail – straight or slightly lowered – is a characteristic feature of this species).



Ill. 87. Fragment of bird presentation on Nidajno fitting no. 5 (Photo M. Bogacki)

A depiction of a peacock with an elongated tail, one marked with a few engraved lines and accompanied by a crescent and star, was placed on a dark blue glass inlay decorating a bronze finger ring discovered in the Roman bath (*balneum*) at Weissenburg (Germany). The baths were destroyed in 174 or 175 AD – this event establishing the *terminus ante quem* for this artefact (Ill. 88: a; Steidl 2019, 74). Peacocks are depicted on items with evidently military connotations, such as a bronze shield (phalera?) probably from Britannia and presenting the emblems and standards (*signa* and *vexillationes*) of legions *XX Valeria Victrix* and *II Augusta* under the joint command of Aurelius Cervianus (253–268; mentioned in an inscription in the upper part of item; Ill. 88: b; Southern, Dixon 1996, 125, ill. 59; Töpfer 2011, 137, 406, pl. 132: Mi 22). The composition on the lower part of the item (peacocks, hounds, hare, deer, and lion) relate to the motif of the hunt and animal chase, symbolizing wealth and success, as expressed in the wish of the inscription: *VTERE FELIX* – literally “use happily”³³.

32 Owing to the poor state of the presentation, establishing its original length is problematic.

33 The *VTERE FELIX* benediction was placed upon various items: *fibulae*, lead mirrors, finger rings,



Ill. 88. a – ring with glass inlay with the presentation of a peacock from Weissenburg, Germany (Steidl 2019, 74); b – bronze shield commemorating *vexillationes* of legions *XX Valeria Victrix* and *II Augusta* from the 2nd half of the 3rd century, loose find (Cowan 2019, 20)

The military belt fittings from Late Antiquity, decorated with a pair of peacocks flanking a “tree of life” are slightly younger, dating to the 4th and early 5th centuries (Ill. 89). Such finds are known from the British Isles (e.g., examples from Stanwyck in Yorkshire and from Wales) and north-west Europe (e.g., as equipment of cremation burials from cemeteries in north Germany: Borgstedt, Kr. Rendsburg-Eckernförde; Fuhlsbüttel, Hansestadt Hamburg; Rahmstorf, Kr. Hamburg), their stylistic features pointing towards a link with products from Britannia (Madyda-Legutko 2016, 617–618, footnote 96, Ill. 8: 9; further literature there)³⁴.

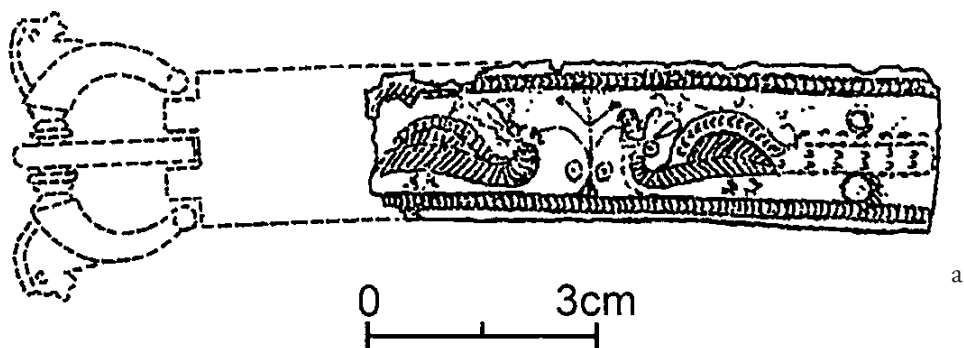
Peacocks are a common motif in Roman and West- or East-Christian art, frequently featured on reliefs, sculptures, mosaics, and paintings (Ill. 90). In Roman art this bird is an attribute of Juno, the mistress of the sky (used in such context on coins of Roman Empresses in the 1st – 3rd centuries). In ancient compositions zoomorphic, plant, and geometric motifs plus personifications and allegories make part of a larger mythological narrative. In the context of apotheosis³⁵, peacocks

pottery, spoons, etc. However, the most numerous category marked with this text in bronze letters are Roman military belts. The height of their popularity was in the 2nd half of the 2nd and first half of the 3rd century (Redžić 2008, 155–159; Hoss 2014).

34 Buckles representing type 1, variant 6 acc. Markus Sommer (1984, pl. 4: 8), with a frame decorated with two animal heads motif. Widespread in the United Kingdom and dated there to the middle of the 3rd century. Possibly the examples from the area of the Elbe estuary and south Jutland could be associated with the first waves of Angle and Saxon migrations to Britannia. At the very least, these finds attest to contact between those two areas.

35 In figural art apotheosis assumes the form of a glorifying presentation or deification of the hero; it was popular and reached its fullest form in the art of Ancient Rome (Zanker 2005).

symbolize e.g., a starry sky and immortality (Anđelković, Rogić, Nikolić 2011, 232–234) – and this probably is how the meaning of peacocks should be interpreted on the aforementioned phalera and ring.



Ill. 89. Ferrules of buckles from military belts decorated with the motif of a pair of peacocks flanking a “tree of life”: a – Westerwanna, Cuxhaven, Germany, burial 701 (Madyda-Legutko 2016, Ill. 8: 9); b – Pen y Corddyn hillfort, Wales (<https://museum.wales/articles/1120/A-Roman-belt-buckle--that-escaped-the-Edwardians/>, accessed on: 23.09.2021); c – Stanwyck, Yorkshire, United Kingdom (© The Trustees of the British Museum; https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/H_OA-7647, accessed on: 20.04.2020)

In early Christian art the peacock gained a new religious context, with such symbology – resurrection, eternal life – now becoming universal (Anđelković, Rogić, Nikolić 2011). As a result this motif found its way into funeral art (single peacocks or in pairs, often as an element of a symbolic depiction of paradise or overcoming death) – in combinations with *kantharos* or the tree of life. Here examples are wall paintings in graves (both pagan and Christian) from the cemetery in *Viminacium* in Serbia (Anđelković, Rogić, Nikolić 2011, 244; Anđelković Grašar, Nikolić, Rogić 2013, 84, Ill. 17–19; Rogić 2018, 185)³⁶.

It is worth noting that frescoes from the walls of graves dating to Late Antiquity reveal a process of reduction of once highly realistic presentations – in this period a certain aversion to present anatomic features “as are” is plain. In this respect realism was replaced by “spiritual content” or pure symbolism. Floral motifs used for backgrounds and depictions of other animals underwent a similar process of simplification and stylization (Anđelković, Grašar, Nikolić, Rogić 2013, 93–94, Ill. 17, 18, 20)³⁷. A good example of this are the Late Antiquity peacocks on the sarcophagus of bishop Theodore at the Basilica of Sant’Apollinare in Classe, Ravenna, (Ill. 90: e) and on a mosaic in north-west Syria dated to the 5th–6th centuries (exact location unknown, at present in the collection of Harvard Art Museums; Ill. 90: d).

The image of the female peacock from the mosaic is more realistic and thus within the canon of presentations on Roman mosaics, whereas the depictions of the peacocks on the sarcophagus had been subject to further stylization. In the context of identifying the motif used for the fitting from Nidajno, the most important aspect is the manner of presenting the tails on these two artefacts. These are quite short and tri-part, and the parallelly arranged feathers are marked with oblique hatching (Anđelković, Rogić, Nikolić 2011, 238–244, Ill. 12) – similarly to the feathers on the Nidajno fitting. Overall, the presentation from Nidajno is nevertheless closer to that of the female peacock from the Syrian mosaic.

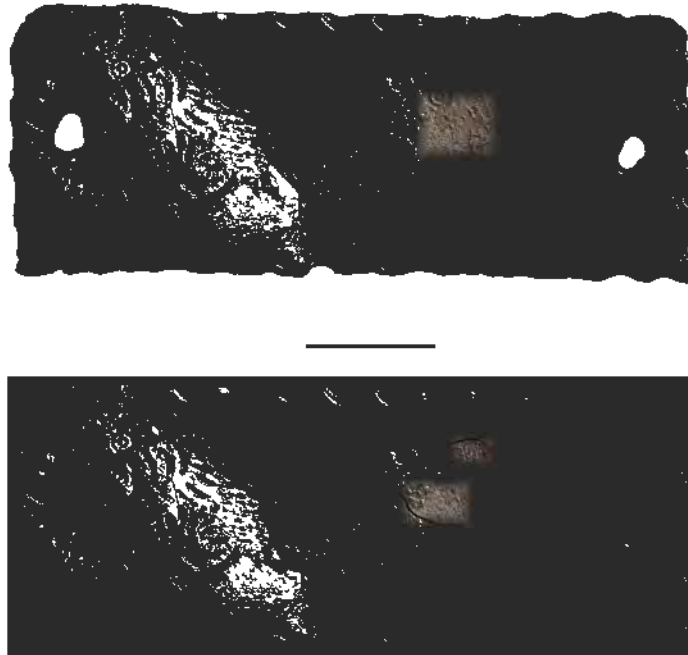
Different interpretative issues are related with the avian presentation on the burned, heavily damaged fitting (no. 4), an element of two contrasting zoomorphic patterns: a lion and a bird facing left. In spite of the heavy abrasion of the bird, its characteristic features may still be made out: a thick beak, a casque of feathers bent backwards on its head, a short body, and well-marked tail (Ill. 91).

36 Peacocks were used in wall decorations of graves G-5517, G-5464, G-5313, G-2624 and G-160 at *Viminacium*. Well preserved paintings with such motif were also discovered in necropolises in Salonika in Greece, Silistra in Bulgaria, and Iznik in Turkey (Rogić 2018, 185).

37 The composition of the painting is dominated by the main motif – a peacock or other birds above the *kantharos*. The typically white background is filled with various stylized forms of flowers, shrubbery, vegetation, and repeated *kantharos*. In some paintings these elements are taken to such a level of abstraction that they are impossible to identify, serving solely to provide depth to the perspective. The entire fresco painting is enclosed in decorated frames (Anđelković Grašar, Nikolić, Rogić 2013, 93).



Ill. 90. a – peacock from the fresco at “grave with Cupids” from *Viminacium* / Stari Kostolac, Serbia (Anđelković, Grašar, Nikolić, Rogić 2013, 86, ill. 17); b – peacock decorating the northern wall of a “pagan grave” G-2624 from *Viminacium* / Stari Kostolac, Serbia (Anđelković, Rogić, Nikolić 2011, 237, ill. 7a); c – presentation of peacock from Bird Mosaic at Santiponce, Spain (<https://mosaic-blues.com/blog/2018/02/06/mosaic-birds-italica-spain/>, accessed on: 9.12.2021); d – fragment of mosaic with female peacock, north-west Syria (Harvard Art Museums, <https://hvard.art/o/148606>, accessed on: 9.12.2021); e – sarcophagus of bishop Theodore at Basilica of Sant’Apollinare in Classe, Ravenna, Italy, decorated with a pair of peacocks with Christ’s monogram (Strafforello 1901, Ill. G. Barberis)



Ill. 91. Fitting with lion and bird from Nidajno no. 4 (Photo M. Bogacki)

Here the identification of the bird's species is on very shaky ground, not only due to the artefact's damaged state, but also the degree of the image's stylization. Nevertheless presentations of birds with casques on their heads and stout beaks (labelled "exotic birds") are known from antique art – examples are provided foremost by frescoes decorating the villas and houses of Roman patricians (Ill. 92: a–b), even if none of these are direct analogies of the presentations on the fitting.

The casque on the head of the bird from Nidajno carries associations with the characteristic feature of the Helmeted Guinea Fowl (*Numida meleagris*), i.e., a skull bone extension tilted slightly to the back. The Guinea Fowl was introduced into the European part of the Roman Empire from Africa, and was presented in Roman art (on mosaics and wall paintings) as game (Boev 2018, 26–34, 36, pl. 2: 9). The outline of the head of the bird from the Nidajno artefact is closer to how the bird really looks (Ill. 92: c) than to its Roman presentations. This could imply that the fitting bears a stylized depiction of a Guinea Fowl, although it also is possible that it was to show a fantastical bird, the appearance of which was inspired by presentations of various exotic animals. In spite of this uncertainty, the combining of this motif with that of a lion places them in the *venatio* motif – hunting and animal chase.



Ill. 92. a – Roman fresco with exotic bird from Large Columbarium at Villa Doria Pamphij, Rome, 2nd half of 1st century (Museo Nazionale Romano, Palazzo Massimo, <https://colosseumrometickets.com/national-roman-museum/#group-20>, accessed on: 9.12.2021); b – fragment of mosaic with Guinea Fowl from 5th – 6th century from *Philippopolis* / Plovdiv, Bulgaria (Boev 2018, pl. 2: 9); c – the Helmeted Guinea fowl (https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Helmeted_guinea-fowl_kruger00.jpg, accessed on: 9.12.2021)

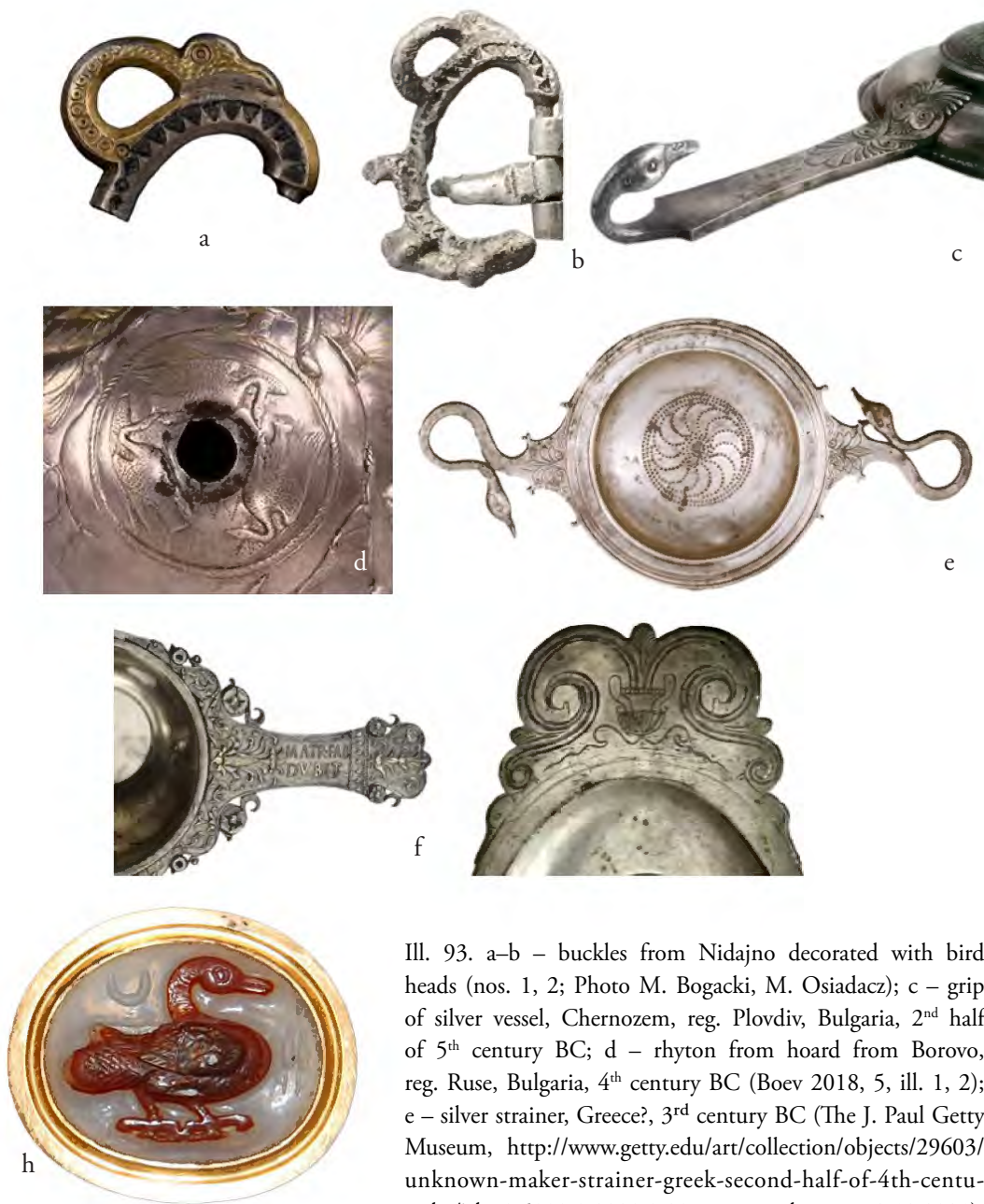
The motif of bird heads also appears on two frames of buckles from the Nidajno assemblage. Only half is preserved from the first (no. 2), yet its original form may be reconstructed from using the second, analogous buckle – this one was preserved in full, although heavily damaged by fire (no. 1). Both are decorated on the external arch of the frame with a pair of bird heads facing in opposite directions (Ill. 93: a–b).

The long neck and the characteristic shapes of the head and beak of those animals suggests water fowl, probably geese or swans, but due to stylization it is better to stay with a general term. The presentations of geese, swans, ducks, and other water fowl were a common motif in ancient art, particularly on mosaics and wall paintings. This motif's long tradition in decorating metal vessels is evidenced by silver Thracian examples discovered in Bulgaria: a strainer with a goose head grip dated to the 2nd half of the 5th century BC from Chernozem (reg. Plovdiv; Ill. 93: c) and a 4th-century BC rhyton decorated with swan motifs from the hoard at Borovo (reg. Ruse; Ill. 93: d; *Passion...* 1994, 77–78, Ill. 31D; Boev 2018, 5, ill. 1, 2). Just like the Greek strainer

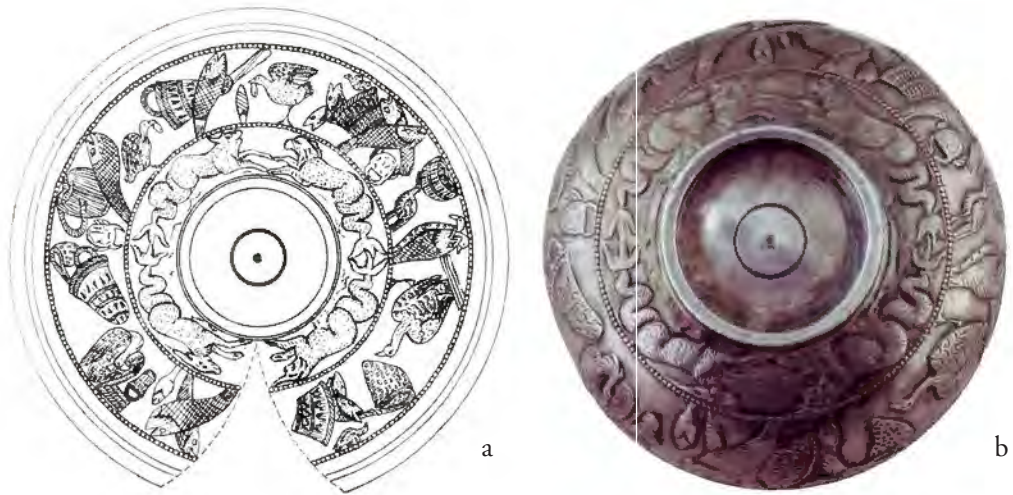
from the early 3rd century BC with bronze geese heads (discovery location unknown, probably Greece; currently in collection of The J. Paul Getty Museum; Ill. 93: e), these are of high quality craftsmanship, with the water fowl motif realistic and finely detailed. In a more simplified form this pattern is also found on later Roman examples: here an example may be the high quality silver saucepan from the Backworth hoard (England, United Kingdom) from the 1st – 2nd century AD. (Ill. 93: f), or the already mentioned provincial Roman vessels of type Eggers 121, dated to the 3rd century. The palmetto shaped grips are decorated at their base (the place where the external rim of the bowl passes into the grip) with symmetrically placed (on both sides) presentations of water fowl – although in their case, due to the simplification of the motif, it is hard to determine if these are geese or swans (Ill. 93: g; Künzl, S. 1993).

Bird presentations are very common in ancient art, being present in various visual contexts and on all sorts of artefacts. Depictions of single birds or pairs as part of the “tree of life” motif are a frequently used theme in Roman and Byzantine art – as elements of built-up scenes, friezes in wall paintings, mosaics, and details placed on utilitarian art objects (cf. Rowland 1978).. One particular example of an artefact with bird presentations is a silver vessel from the hoard discovered at Muncelu de Sus, Jassy District (Romania), dated to the 2nd – 3rd centuries and ascribed to Alexandrian workshops. The external surface of the vessel is decorated with a split design ornament: its lower part (inner) features depictions of four sea hybrids facing one another, the upper (external) – baskets with fish and sea birds (Ill. 94; Aurul și Argintul 2017, 145). Both motifs, even if one is mythological and the other realistic, share a maritime context convergent with e.g., the style of presentations on similarly dated buckets from Hemmoor (Aurul și Argintul 2014, 530, ill. 142.1.1). The interesting feature of the vessel from Muncelu de Sus is the combining of fantastical and realistic motifs.

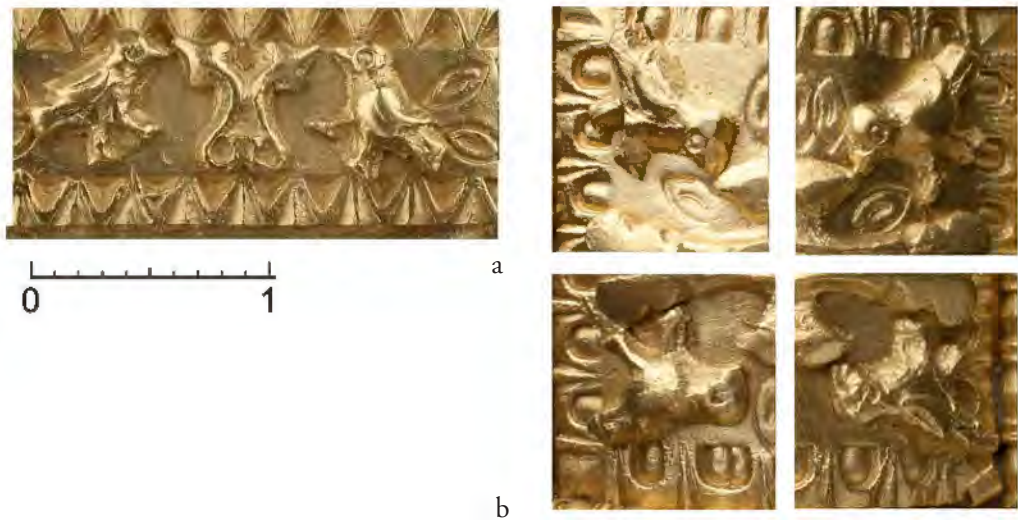
Avian presentations made with a single stamp on the golden sword fitting from Nidajno are different. The four birds, placed in different places upon the fitting of the sword scabbard neck, have beaks turned inward (Ill. 95: b). In the central section of the cross-guard fitting there is a pair of birds facing one another and separated with a floral motif (leaves of a stylized lotus or ivy; see Vida 2017, 106–109), thus creating a classical composition associated with the “tree of life” motif (see Nowakiewicz, Rzeszotarska-Nowakiewicz 2012, 115; Ill. 95: a). The bird depictions as such, even though detailed, do not bear any characteristic features and are difficult to assign to any specific species. These seem to be associated more with similar presentations of hunted birds and small birds known from Roman frescoes and mosaics, and represent differing levels of realism. The visible difference between the individualized presentations of birds from the Nidajno leather strap fittings and bird appliques on the golden sword fitting point to these items (similarly as the depictions of lions) not having been designed as a single, stylistically consistent set.



Ill. 93. a–b – buckles from Nidajno decorated with bird heads (nos. 1, 2; Photo M. Bogacki, M. Osiadacz); c – grip of silver vessel, Chernozem, reg. Plovdiv, Bulgaria, 2nd half of 5th century BC; d – rhyton from hoard from Borovo, reg. Ruse, Bulgaria, 4th century BC (Boev 2018, 5, ill. 1, 2); e – silver strainer, Greece?, 3rd century BC (The J. Paul Getty Museum, <http://www.getty.edu/art/collection/objects/29603/unknown-maker-strainer-greek-second-half-of-4th-century-bc/?dz=0.5000,0.2998,0.90>, accessed on: 9.12.2021); f – silver colander from 1st – 2nd century hoard from Backworth, United Kingdom (The British Museum, https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/H_1850-0601-1, accessed on: 9.12.2021); g – grip of type Eggers 121 vessel (The Metropolitan Museum of Art., <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/>, accessed on: 9.12.2021); h – Roman gemma with duck, 1st – 2nd century (The British Museum, https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/G_1814-0704-1501, accessed on: 9.12.2021)



Ill. 94. a–b – motifs decorating the vessel from the hoard from Muncelu de Sus, Romania (Aurul și Argintul 2017, 145)



Ill. 95. Depictions of birds from the golden cross-guard (a; no. 11) and scabbard neck set of fittings (b; no. 12) of the sword from Nidajno (Photo M. Bogacki)

A common theme of many of such presentations is the bird being shown in a “stepping” position, with one leg raised and extended forward (Ill. 95). In such context a particularly interesting artefact is the “Bird Mosaic”, discovered in the 2nd-century “Domus of the Birds” from *Italica* near Seville (Spain), in the former Roman province of *Hispania Baetica*. The mosaic consists of 35 square fields with depictions of various bird species: game, domesticated, and decorative. The central part held the main presentation, which was not preserved. All birds were shown in profile, with many in the “stepping” stance (Ill. 96: a–e). Birds were similarly presented also on later mosaics and frescoes, e.g., the mosaic from the Roman villa at Devnya (*Marcianopolis*, Bulgaria), dated to the turn of the 3rd and 4th centuries (Ill. 96: f).

The continuation of the Roman canon of animal depictions, avian included, is plainly visible in artefacts of purely Christian character, e.g., an Early Byzantine, 4th-century “Bird Mosaic” from the Armenian sepulchral chapel in Jerusalem (Greenwood, Adams 2015, 123; Ill. 96: g) and a decorated relief from Archbishop Agnello’s pulpit at the Ravenna cathedral, dated to his ministry in 557–570 (Dalton 1961; Ill. 97). These testify to the durability of such motifs which, in the changing cultural and civilizational environment, were given a new, now Christian symbolism.

Ancient presentations of birds were an inspiration for Barbarian goldsmiths, as evidenced by bird depictions decorating the embossed silver and golden plaques from the Northern European *Barbaricum* in the late stages of Roman influence. Compared with the Roman originals these are simplified and schematic enough as to be assigned to one of two categories: birds with long necks (resembling geese) and small, squat, short-necked birds (Przybyła 2018, 543–556). The depictions from the Nidajno assemblage evidently are different and are closer to Roman presentations. The motif of birds (and lions and floral elements) decorating the gold fittings of the sword from Nidajno doubtless belong to the Roman artistic tradition and probably had been made by a Roman goldsmith with intimate knowledge of such aesthetics.



a

Ill. 96. a–e – The Bird Mosaic from *Itálica* / Santiponce, Spain, and details of a pigeon, sparrow, mallard, and geese (https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Category:Mosaic_of_the_Domus_of_the_Birds,_Itálica, accessed: 9.12.2021); f – detail of mosaic with depiction of quail from Roman villa at *Marcianopolis* / Devnya, Bulgaria, 3rd–4th c. (<https://www.facebook.com/therusticbulgarianvilla/photos/2389615504606056>; accessed on: 20.11.2019); g – Bird Mosaic from Armenian Chapel, 4th century, detail, Jerusalem, Israel (https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/0/05/Armenian_rugs%2C_erusaxemi_xjankarner.jpg, accessed on: 9.12.2021)



b



c



d



e



f



g



Ill. 97. a – Archbishop Agnello's pulpit (557–570), Ravenna cathedral, Italy; b – detail with depiction of pigeon (https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Duomo_di_ravenna,_int.,_pulpito_a_torre_del_vecovo_agnello,_550-600_ca._02.JPG, accessed on: 9.12.2021)

5.4. Symbolism of depictions

The selection of the above-described artefacts was dictated by the proximity of their iconographic form to the assemblage from Nidajno. A predominating majority of presentations conforming to such criteria was placed on utilitarian items and elements of personal equipment manufactured in territories of the Roman Empire, often at locations along the *limes* and connected with a Roman military presence. The characteristics of the presentations and elements of design of the fittings from Nidajno point to these having been crafted in exactly such a cultural context, and their similarity to Roman wares allows the application of the very same interpretative tools for analyzing their symbology as those used for items of Roman origin. This symbolism was closely related with the religious and mythological spheres and, in the case of military equipment, also had a protective role. In the Nidajno assemblage the most sophisticated content may be seen on the palmetto fitting (no. 8) and the fitting with the chase of five beasts (no. 7) – and these artefacts will be the main guide in the attempt to decipher the Nidajno assemblage's symbolic meaning.

The animal chase motif used on the fitting with five beasts (no. 7) is also present, as already described, in the ornamentation of Roman military equipment, mostly from the 1st century AD in the Empire's north-western provinces. In the case of *cingula* and gladius scabbard fittings the

depictions on individual elements of the sets³⁸ are complimentary, forming – in the words of Ernst Künzl (1998, 408) – a consistent “iconographic unit”. Although the set of fittings from the Nidajno assemblage is incomplete, it may be assumed that it was similarly made according to a single design (especially as all recorded motifs are present on elements of Roman personal military equipment). Small fittings with single depictions and large, multi-element fittings together formed “iconographic units” (Künzl, E. 1998, 408), in which every element made part of the design – and this is how these should be treated.

Presentations of animals and mythological beasts are commonplace in Roman military symbolism, as exemplified by e.g., the standards of individual Legions. Under the Empire every Legion had a golden eagle emblem – the *aquila*, accompanied by additional symbols – these often being zomorphic signs of the zodiac (Capricorn, Taurus, Leo, etc.). The connection with the zodiac is not fully clear, as only the “animalistic” signs were used in such context (i.e., no Libra, Gemini, Aquarius or Virgo). Every cohort, manipule, or *centuria* had its own standard. Typically these were poles topped with presentations of animals (*aquila*, *draco*), markings on shields (*signa*), banners attached to a horizontal crossbar (*vexillum*) and images of the Emperor (*imago*) etc.³⁹ (Garbsch 1978, 14–15; Hesberg 2003; Töpfer 2011, 260–261; Gencheva 2013, 89–90, ill. 235–238). The reinforcement of the symbolical message is visible on the bronze plaque (phalera) from Britannia with the *vexilla* of two Legions stationed there – the *XX Valeria Victrix* and *II Augusta*, featuring the accompanying legionary emblems – wild boar and capricorn – and below these the motif of animal chase / *venatio*, including a lion, a deer, two hounds, a hare, and two peacocks (Töpfer 2011, 137, 406).

Animals depicted on elements of parade armour – such as a bull, a capricorn, a wild boar, or gryphon – were also used as emblems of individual units and formations, Legions in particular. These often were signs of the zodiac related with the date of the formation’s establishment or the birthday of its founder. In the 1st century the bull was dedicated to Venus, the divine mother of the Julian Imperial family, and by the 3rd century it became the emblem of several legions – *III Gallica*, *IV Macedonica*, *V Macedonica*, *VII Claudia*, *VIII Augusta*, *X Fretensis* and *X Gemina*. The lion was an emblem of the *IV Flavia Felix* and *XIII Gemina*, the capricorn – of *I Adiutrix*, *II Augusta*, *IV Macedonica*, *XIV Gemina*, *XXII Primigenia* and *XXX Ulpia* as well as *Augusta*, the wild boar – of *I Italica* and *XX Valeria Victrix*, while the *Lupa Capitolina* – of legion *II Italica* (Töpfer 2011; further literature there).

At times it is easy to identify the unit the owner of an artefact belonged to – an example may be the two armour sets from *Carnuntum*: one with a *Lupa Capitolina*, associated with a soldier of

38 Probably making part of the equipment of higher ranked members of the Roman military (Künzl, E. 1998, 408).

39 The very same applies to *auxilia* units: *cohors equitata* (infantry with cavalry) and *ala* (cavalry) carried *vexilla*, while smaller detachments (*centuriae* or *turmae*) – *signa*. The soldiers of every unit identified with those symbols, the loss of a standard being extremely dishonouring (Töpfer 2011).

the *legio II Italica*, the other with a capricorn – a legionary from the *legio XIV Gemina*; the same applies to the lion from the chanfron discovered at *Apulum*, indicating ownership by a member of the *legio XIII Gemina* stationed there. However, unit affiliation is not always evident, e.g., the owner of the armour with capricorn from *Carnuntum* or *Brigetio* may just as well have served with the *legio XIV Gemina* at *Carnuntum* or the *legio I Adiutrix* from the camp at *Brigetio*, as both Legions had the same sigillum. On the other hand the fitting discovered at Orgovány in Hungary – with a bull and the inscription *legio X Gemina* – can be quite precisely dated: this Legion was transferred from *Brigetio* or *Aquincum* to Dacia around 107 AD (Garbsch 1978, 31; Töpfer 2011, 80–81).

It is difficult to gauge how well aware were the makers and users of armour from *auxilia* units of the religious connotations of the motifs decorating such equipment, and to what extent the *interpretatio romana* subsumed the deities of the various peoples from which the auxiliaries were recruited. The chanfron from Gherli in Romania may serve as an example of possible combinations, as it shows Mars accompanied by a goose – the sacred animal of the Germanic deity Tiu/Tyr. A four-times repeated depiction of Mars with a goose, identified with Tiu/Tyr, was also used as decoration on a shield (phalera) no. 1 from Thorsberg, probably of Barbarian make (Werner 1941, 10–22, 35; Garbsch 1978, 32; Blankenfeldt 2015a, 253–254, ill. 152; Przybyła 2018, 543).

Depictions of dolphins, hippocampuses, capricorns, and other sea animals accompanying warships and the goddess Victoria on a blue globe appeared in compositions repeated on propaganda monuments funded by Octavian after the battle of Actium in 31 BC. Such scenes, symbolizing Rome's victory over Egypt, were easy to duplicate and thus spread all across the Empire, quickly making their way onto private buildings, grave stellae, various pieces of equipment and gemmae, thereby becoming part of visual language in the private sphere, often taking on meanings understandable only in the specific local context (Zanker 1999, 88–89; Hesberg 2003).

Protective equipment, this including parade armour, had two basic functions: to keep the wearer safe and to intimidate foes. This is evidenced by the programme of depictions which went beyond the purely decorative, e.g., images of Jupiter or Hercules with a club may have conferred protection (Garbsch 1978, 14–15). The use of dolphins, hippocampuses, sea panthers, sea lions, and other aquatic beasts in a military context were also a symbolic image of life after death – all these creatures belong to Neptune's retinue and are an allegory for the journey to the Netherworld across the ocean surrounding the world of the living, hence their popularity on stellae/gravestones (Klumbach 1960; Hesberg 2004; further literature there). This context also includes other maritime deities and Neptune's companions – tritons. These perform an apotropaic role, just as snakes/serpents on armour and used as a "miniaturized" head of the Medusa. Such attributes, associated mostly with military symbols, appear on helmet masks and horse chanfrons and on medallions incorporated into harness. Because these were used to decorate the entire surface of the helmet (like the example from Theilenhofen in Bavaria; Töpfer 2011, 256, pl. 130: Mi 14),

the wearer had all around protection against the Evil Eye. Owing to her descent from sea gods, the Medusa is also associated with other aquatic creatures used to decorate armour. A similar function is performed by the image of Scylla with dolphins swimming around her on a helmet from the 1st-century Thracian barrow A from Vize, Kırklareli Province, Turkey (Başgelen 2009, 12–13, 42–43, ill. 43, 44a–b; D’Amato, Negin 2017, ill. 197: a). In turn snakes/serpents – animals from the Underworld and the Chthonic Kingdom – when used on helmets (e.g., from Ostrova in Bulgaria or Eining in Bavaria; D’Amato, Negin 2017, ill. 173, 258) possibly could have transformed the wearer’s head, through a *pars pro toto* mechanism, into the head of the Medusa. And finally the gryphon also was an apotropaic symbol – as it was a hybrid with the head of an eagle and body of a lion (Garbsch 1978, 14–15)⁴⁰, and occasionally equipped with wings, like on the fitting from Nidajno (no. 7).

The dragon on the fitting from Nidajno is difficult to interpret. As outlined above, the accompanying dolphin and capricorn presentations are related with the symbolism of life after death, while gryphons were commonly regarded as apotropaic. While the above creatures appear quite often on elements of Roman armour, the presentations of sea serpents (also termed sea dragons) – and known from maritime scenes in sculptures and elements of architecture – are practically non-existent in such a capacity on military equipment. The depiction of the Nidajno dragon is also quite distant from the convention used in presentations of sea beasts. The similarity to the Roman *draco* standard – especially apparent when compared with the preserved example from Niederbieber – confirms the strong military connotations of the image.

The *gryllos* motif from the palmetto fitting (no. 8) does not belong to the typical Roman repertoire of presentations used on military equipment. In the Roman context it appears in similar form almost exclusively on gemmae, items also ascribed with apotropaic properties or regarded as good-luck charms. In the case of the *gryllos* from Nidajno an important facet is the ennobling context of the presentation – i.e., its placement in the *aedicula*, in iconography a position reserved for deities. Such use of the *aedicula* may be seen on votive plaques and occasionally on elements of armour (e.g., the greaves from Straubing).

The repertoire of anthropomorphic elements decorating various elements of Roman protective equipment is quite uniform and tightly interwoven with religious beliefs. Armour plates/ breast-plates typically bear the busts of Mars and Minerva (or Virtus) accompanied by an eagle (above) and shield (below). Single presentations of Jupiter, Mars, or Victoria are combined with a bull,

⁴⁰ Some differences in the decorations of parade helmets and armour may be explained by the different times of their manufacture: most figural decorations on armour, greaves, medallions, and chanfrons are dated to the late 2nd and early 3rd centuries, whereas many parade helmets date to the 1st and early 2nd centuries AD. (Garbsch 1978, 14–15). In this situation carved presentations on military personnel’s gravestones may be used as the point of reference; however, the number of good iconographic sources for cavalry equipment is low, and depictions on them are not very useful for reconstruction purposes due the propagandist, less detailed character of parts of the reliefs (Coulston 2004, 141; Hoss 2014, 283).

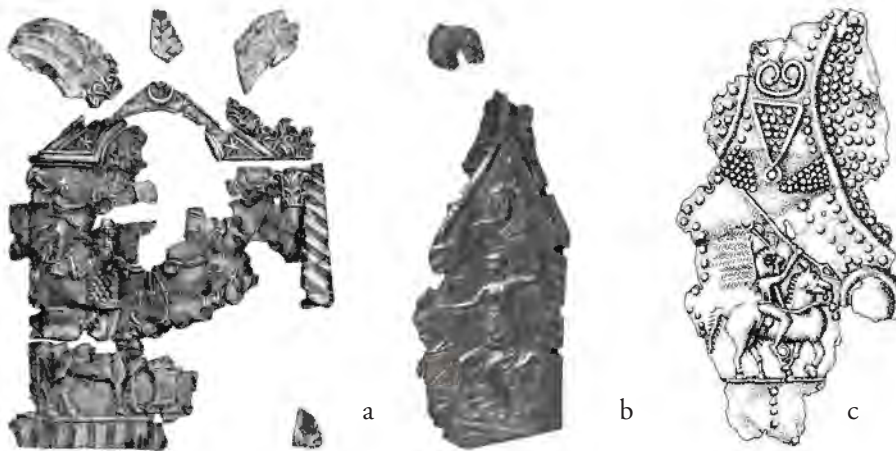
capricorn, or *Lupa Capitolina* and – obligatorily – with an eagle. Decorations of medallions and shield-bosses are dominated by busts of Ganymede and silhouettes of Minerva, often with Mars, Victoria, and Hercules in the background with retinues of lions, dolphins, and other sea creatures. In turn Mars, Victoria, and Hercules are the main characters on greaves, alongside depictions of eagles, snakes, and sea creatures. Such motifs also appear on chanfrons. Other martial deities depicted on military equipment are Virtus and Bellona, as well as the *Dioscuri* (Garbsch 1978, 29; Töpfer 2011, 254–255, pl. 131, 132). Jupiter, Juno and Minerva form the Capitoline Triad, the most important gods of Rome and whose cult dominated the structure of the Roman State Religion – and it is worth mentioning here that Jupiter, Minerva, plus Mars or Victoria were also *di militares*, the gods of the army. Following the example flowing from the units of the Praetorian/*Caesar's* Guard, commanders of units stationed in the provinces placed those deities on the standards of their formations. Jupiter, the principal deity of the pantheon and patron of both State and Army is depicted with a fistful of thunderbolts; in many cases the thunderbolts are replaced with an eagle – his emblematic bird. The combining of an eagle with busts of Minerva and Mars on armour is interpreted to be a full representation of the *di militares* (Garbsch 1978, 29; Töpfer 2011, 253). In this context it is interesting that an armoured Minerva – fully armed and in Corinthian helmet with high protome – was the Imperial Army's patron goddess of artists, legionary and civilian officials, *evocati* (veterans on active duty), commanders, *armaturae* – drill instructors, appointed by Hadrian to tasks such as preparing soldiers for *hippica gymnasia*. Mars ranked as the second most important deity – behind Jupiter – of the Imperial Era Roman army. Its cult – particularly that of Mars Ultor, i.e., the Avenger, was particularly popular among the *auxilia*. Similarly to Minerva, Mars also was the patron god of the training field, with preserved depictions showing him in a Corinthian helmet or in divine nudity, with strapped sword, or in full armour worn over a tunic (Garbsch 1978, 30; Töpfer 2011, 256). As already mentioned, in many presentations (including figurines) the tall protome of Corinthian helmets worn by Minerva and Mars resembles an animal head, growing out of a human (in this case divine) skull (see Nagy 2007).

The uniqueness of the composition on the Nidajno palmetto makes its interpretation more difficult. Its symbology may be read in several ways. As to the *gryllos* – it is not possible to pinpoint the deity it may be representing, although narrowing the field down to several “suspects” is possible.

Assuming that this is the centrepiece, then the other elements should be subordinate to it. This assumption is based upon the arrangement of the composition: in spite of the centre being occupied by the hippocampus (in the place where on votive plaques the *aedicula* with the depiction of the deity would be), the creature has its head turned towards the feet/legs of the *gryllos*, this possibly implying subordination. The “tree of life”, hiding birds in its crown – and here rendered in the form of the palmetto – should be viewed in a similar light. In this arrangement portions related with the element of water (sea horse) and air (birds in the crown of a tree) are subordinated

to the anthropomorphic *gryllos*. Astral elements, the “three peaks” crowned with crescents at the *gryllos*’ feet, reinforce the message about the importance of this figure.

The design elements linking the fitting from Nidajno with several known votive plaques are: the palmetto form of the item, the image in the *aedicula*, and the astral themes⁴¹, the main difference being the presence of zoomorphic elements in the Nidajno artefact. Of particular note in such context are the repeated “equine elements”, i.e., the horse head shaped protome of the *gryllos* and the hippocampus. This brings to mind associations with presentations associated with religious cults in the Roman Empire – especially in the provinces along the northern *limes*. Considering the military context of the Nidajno assemblage, of particular interest are elements which potentially may be associated with deities worshipped by soldiers and veterans.



Ill. 98. a – plaque from Heddernheim, Frankfurt am Main, Germany (https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/G_1896-0620-3, accessed on: 9.12.2021); b – plaque from Ashwell, Hertfordshire, United Kingdom (https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/H_2003-0901-18, accessed on: 9.12.2021); c – plaque from Krakovan-Straži, Slovakia, burial 2 (Quast 2009a, ill. 73: 1)

⁴¹ Astral motifs, including a crescent lying in the “tympanum”, are known from votive plaques from Heddernheim, Frankfurt am Main (Germany) or Ashwell, Hertfordshire (UK). The silver, gilded plaque from Heddernheim has an *aedicula* presentation in its central section. In the *aedicula* we see Jupiter Dolichenus standing atop a bull, with a two-headed axe in his right and a bundle of thunderbolts in his left hand. Victoria is soaring above him. On the right there is a goddess standing atop a quadrupedal animal, holding a patera and sceptre in her hand (Ill. 98: a). The central part of the silver plaque from Ashwell show an *aedicula* with a gable roof, surrounded by a leaf-motif frame. There are two figural presentations inside the *aedicula* – in the triangular peak beneath the crescent there is a bust of Sol – the god of the Sun, in a fiery diadem and with a short whip on his right shoulder. Below him is the goddess Roma looking to the right, seated upon a throne of war spoils. She is armed and the winged goddess Victoria is standing on her extended right arm. At the goddess’ feet there is yet another figure, shown in profile, but damaged and incomplete (Ill. 98: b).

A cult with unquestionably Oriental roots and popular in military circles was that of Jupiter Dolichenus – one of the more mysterious deities of antiquity. Particularly numerous finds testifying to its popularity come from the 2nd – 3rd centuries from areas along the *limes*, the result of the cult's exceptional popularity among soldiers of the units stationed there. The units' high mobility probably explains the rapid expansion of this cult in the 2nd century AD. In 125–126 AD the *legatus* of *legio III Augusta* – Sextus Iulius Maior – founded a temple at *Lambaesis* (Algeria) dedicated to Jupiter Dolichenus. A few decades later the cult of this deity became an official military cult, attested from areas stretching from Georgia⁴² and the Crimea to Britannia (Speidel 1978, 4–12; Horig, Schwertheim 1987; Collar 2011; 2013; Fowlkes-Childs 2012; 2019; Winter 2015; Blömer 2019; Blömer, Winter 2019, 14). It reached the height of its popularity under the Severan dynasty (193–235). The syncretic cult of Dolichenus combined elements of Oriental solar cults (such as Baal) and the Roman Jupiter, ascribing it with attributes of a universal Saviour. It also was revered as a god of victory, of success, as the lord and protector of the world. It acquired the above “portfolio” in spite of originally being worshipped in the Syrian kingdom of Commagene at the start of its – as noted by Maria Jaczynowska (1987, 201) – “unexpected «career» in the Roman universe” (Winter 2015), as a god of storms and mountains (Boda, Szabó 2011, 273–274; Winter 2015)⁴³. Regardless of how widespread this cult became, our knowledge about its origin, practices or rituals – and their religious meaning – continues to be limited (Winter 2015; Blömer 2019; Blömer, Winter 2019, 14).

The presentations of Jupiter Dolichenus are different from the classic imagery of other deities and easy to recognize: the deity is shown in military dress (Persian or Roman) standing on a bull, with a fistful of thunderbolts in an outstretched left hand and an axe in the raised right hand, with either a tiara or Phrygian cap on his head, with his symbolic bird being an eagle. Jupiter Dolichenus is often depicted alongside a goddess standing on a deer – Juno Regina, the lady/mistress of all terrestrial animals (Speidel 1978, 24; further literature there). One example of such a presentation is the already-mentioned silver votive plaque from Heddernheim (Ill. 98: a).

In this context, what is of particular interest is a certain type of presentation used on the relief at a Dolichenus temple from the vicinity of a military camp at Mehadia in Dacia (Romania) and dated to the 2nd – 4th centuries. The relief itself comes from the turn of the 2nd and 3rd centuries

42 A unique golden votive plaque - a gift to Jupiter Dolichenus - was discovered during research at the Roman fort of Apsaros in Gonio, Georgia, by a team led by Dr Radosław Karasiewicz-Szczypiorski (Centre for Mediterranean Archaeology, UW) and Dr Lasha Aslanishvili (Agency for the Protection of Cultural Heritage of Adjara). [https://naukawpolsce.pl/aktualnosci/news%2C105035%2Cgruzja-zlota-plakietka-wotywna-odkryta-w-rzymskim-forcie-apsaros.html?fbclid=IwY2xjawGF0M-FleHRuA2FlbQIxMQABHULVTR5JYXR4KuCv-B_mxUjFP7kbXKDVCrBlnpIyeFUrEC3VhK-1d1YbDcw_aem_KRlikI7TwnExDI8FphCHEw](https://naukawpolsce.pl/aktualnosci/news%2C105035%2Cgruzja-zlota-plakietka-wotywna-odkryta-w-rzymskim-forcie-apsaros.html?fbclid=IwY2xjawGF0M-FleHRuA2FlbQIxMQABHULVTR5JYXR4KuCv-B_mxUjFP7kbXKDVCrBlnpIyeFUrEC3VhK-1d1YbDcw_aem_KRlikI7TwnExDI8FphCHEw; accessed on: 23.10.2024); accessed on: 23.10.2024.

43 The beginnings of the cult are associated with the city of Doliche in ancient northern Syria (today south-east Turkey). Its sanctuary was located outside the ancient city, on the flat top of the plainly visible Dülük Baba Tepesi mountain (Blömer 2019).

and presents the front of a temple with an *aedicula* decorated with floral motifs and acanthus leaves. The *aedicula* holds a scene where an eagle with spread wings and a wreath in its beak is standing on the back of a deer; the rounded shape of the deer's antlers suggests – according to Imola Body and Csaba Szabó – the Sun (Ill. 99: b). The eagle's position symbolizes rulership and power. This motif, probably of Scythian origin, found its way into the Balkans, being identified in Thracian art. In Roman art it is interpreted as an illustration of Imperial Order: the deer, a land animal, represents the Earth, while the eagle, an attribute of Jupiter, represents the Emperor's power and the might of Rome (Boda, Szabó 2011, 275–276). In the iconographic repertoire related with the cult of Jupiter Dolichenus an eagle represents Jupiter himself, while the deer is a symbolic animal of Juno Regina (Dolicheny; Boda, Szabó 2011, 277–280; cf. Horig, Schwertheim 1987, 262, pl. XIV: 43, XCIII: 405; Belis 2024).

The scene from the Mehadia relief appears, in simplified form, on one of the two silver leather strap fittings from Wrocław-Zakrzów, burial III, decorated with presentations of an eagle and deer (Ill. 99: a, c; see Nagy 2007, 75). As mentioned in Chapter 3, the fittings from burial III at Wrocław-Zakrzów were decorated with zoomorphic motifs and are the best stylistic analogies for the Nidajno assemblage. Hence the linking of the scene from the Wrocław-Zakrzów find with the repertoire of Dolichenus cult imagery in some way reinforces the theory that the roots of the presentations on the Nidajno assemblage may be found among military cults along the Danubian *limes*. An additional element linking the fittings from both sites is the motif of the repeated, symmetrically placed bird heads, with the motif from fitting no. 2 from Wrocław-Zakrzów appearing to be a reduced version of the motif from the Nidajno palmetto (Ill. 99: c, d).

An antlered stag also appears in the iconography of the Dolichenus cult of the Syrian Baal from Commagene, the Jupiter Turmasgade. This deity, considered to be an incarnation of Jupiter Dolichenus, is known only from a scattering of inscriptions and presentations. It is depicted as an eagle holding a laurel wreath in its beak and subduing deer-like animals (in another version it is shown holding in its talons a head of animal – that of a horse, snake, or deer-like animal). The dominance of an eagle over mammals and reptiles symbolized the omnipotence of the sky deity and its rule over living nature. Both cults originating from Commagene (Jupiter Dolichenus and Turmasgade) were closely linked and were adapted twice in the same area (Szabó, C. 2018, 137–139). According to Csaba Szabó, most of the depictions of these two deities are characterized by a unique and individualized visual message, possibly implying that these were the products of individual religious reflection and personal interpretation of some known narrative (although other factors cannot be ruled out, such as: what the workshop was capable of making, financial constraints, or artistic innovation). This fluidity of the iconography of certain canonical features in provincial Roman art (here – imagery related with the Dolichenus cult) testifies to the flexibility and local variations in religious narratives pertaining to those deities (Szabó, C. 2018, 139–140).



Ill. 99. a, c – fittings from Wrocław-Zakrzów, burial III (Quast 2009a, ill. 73: 5, 6); b – Dolichenus relief from Mehădia, Romania (Boda, Szabó 2011, ill. 1); d – detail of fitting from Nidajno (no. 8; Photo M. Bogacki)

What is evidently missing in the above interpretive track is the lack of an equine motif – an important element of the composition of the Nidajno fitting connecting it – by way of the *gryllos* – with the Herpály shield-boss. Andreas Alföldi tabled the theory that the presentations of the hybrids on the Herpály shield-boss and the Osztrópataka-Ostrovany plaques reflect the influence of Romano-Oriental mystery cults (Alföldi 1934, 137–138; Nagy 2007, 74–75); he did not develop that theory into a full interpretation, though. Hence the *grylloi* from Herpály would have been linked with the provincial Roman craftsmanship of Noricum and Pannonia, and with Celtic roots at that (Alföldi 1934; see Przybyła 2018, 542). One should note, however, that only two *grylloi* artefacts from the Middle Danube are known (the discussed finds from Herpály and Osztrópataka-Ostrovany). Two additional items with such depictions were found in Ukraine, but due to the murky circumstances of their discovery it is not known where exactly they come from.

Nevertheless, it is telling that classic gemmae with this motif are known from all across the Empire (from along the *limes* too), while barbarized *grylloi* depictions appear solely in areas to the north of the Middle Danube.

The equine motif on the Nidajno fitting leads us to yet other cults popular along the Middle and Upper Danube and in the Balkans – the Danubian Horsemen and the Thracian Rider. The cult of the Danubian Horsemen – or Horseriders – is named after the characteristic depiction of a pair of horse-mounted characters on votive plaques and reliefs. These are known principally from the Empire's provinces located along the Danube (Pannonia Superior and Inferior, Moesia Superior and Inferior, Dacia and Dalmatia; Nemeti, S. 2015; Szabó, Á. 2017, 13; Szabó, C., Boda 2019, 18–19). Over a thousand such items – mostly plaques – with symbolic elements accompanying the riders have been discovered and dated from the 1st to the 4th centuries. Both the chronology and spatial placement of the finds attest to the cult's uninterpreted functioning. It did evolve, though. The largest numbers of plaques had been discovered between *Mursa* and *Sirmium* (in south-east Pannonia Inferior) on the one hand, and *Singidunum* and *Viminacium* (Moesia Superior) on the other. This gives rise to the theory that *Sirmium* may have been the seat of a sanctuary and thus disseminated this religious phenomena over a major segment of Danubian territories. Current scholarship also holds that similar plaques discovered in other regions of the Empire had been imported there from Illyria (Szabó, Á. 2017, 95). An example of a local cult centre may be Pec in Hungary (*Sopianae*), the place where four plaques were discovered dating to the Severan dynasty or minimally later – up to the destruction caused by the Roxolanian-Sarmatian invasion of 258–260 AD (Ill. 100: b; Szabó, Á. 2017, 124–126).

In the recent literature this cult is identified with the adoration of *Domnus et Domna*. The interpretative emphasis has been transferred from the figures of the horsemen to that of the divine couple, associated with a god of the Sky or Sun and a goddess of the Earth or Moon, originally revered by the native pre-Roman population of Illyria. Domna is given the same alias as used for Juno – *Regina* (also called *mater*) which, similarly to the alias of her male counterpart, the solar deity Domnus – *Invictus*, suggests her highest possible divine status. Such honorifics suggest that originally Domna was of greater importance than Domnus, possibly a holdover from pre-Roman times⁴⁴. The divine couple were included among the gods responsible for good fortune (*propitius*) and were of a more universal character than smaller, regional deities, although not in opposition to them, as evidenced by shared dedications. However, the couple never appears in the company of gods from the Roman State Religion. Believers of both sexes, identified in inscriptions on the

⁴⁴ On plaques dated to the 2nd and early 3rd centuries the female deity (central figure, goddess) seems to be of greater import than her male counterpart. However, on later plaques more emphasis is given to the presentation of the solar deity, making them of equal import. The change is evidence of the increasing importance of the cult of *Sol Invictus* in the Roman State Pantheon in the 2nd half of the 3rd century (Szabó, Á. 2017, 98).

plaques and reliefs, came from all social groups, the main idea of the cult being rebirth after death, this explaining its popularity (Szabó, Á. 2017, 23).



Ill. 100. Votive plaques with horsemen motif: a – *Quadrata* / Lébény-Barátföldpuszta, Hungary; b – *Sopiana* / Pecz, Hungary; c – *Cibalae* / Vinkovci, Croatia (Szabó, Á. 2017, ill. 3, 8.a, V: 2)

In terms of composition, the horseman motif (combining anthropomorphic and zoomorphic aspects) is subordinate to Domna and Domnus, thus setting it apart from the Nidajno fitting; there the *gryllos* is the centrepiece of the composition, with other elements appearing to be semantically subordinate to. Nevertheless, some similarities may still be drawn: the division of the composition into sections, the presence of elements probably related with chthonic symbolism, with the Earth and Sky. Some details from the plaques are identified as symbols with sepulchral connotations, while others – as star constellations. An example of the latter may be the votive plaque from *Quadrata* (Lébény-Barátföldpuszta in Hungary), where below the inscription there is a twice-repeated pattern of three points (Ill. 100: a). The use of an astral motif in this context is perceived as emphasizing the divine status of the horse-riders (Szabó, Á. 2017, 34). This makes it an analogy to the manner of combining the lunar motif with the depiction of the *gryllos* on the palmetto fitting from Nidajno (three crescents placed beneath the presentation) and testifies to the similar usage of iconographic tools.

One should keep in mind that the iconography of cult presentations on such *vota* is, in stylistic terms, lifted from Roman presentations. As proven by Ádám Szabó, compositions on the plaques show similarities (mostly formal, and not in content) to cult images of Jupiter Dolichenus and Mithras. This scholar interprets such similarities as resulting from the use of the Roman iconographic instrumentarium, e.g., types of depictions, to create a new manner of communicating content related with religious practice from the pre-Roman era. This would mean that the “Hellenistic-Roman” manner of presentation was adopted by local workshops as a result of the inflow

of Roman cultural patterns. It also is possible that the cult arose in Illyria under the influence of the Roman colonial presence, or at the very least was dramatically altered by it⁴⁵ (Szabó, Á. 2017, 13–14). Regardless of such observations, the fact is that on the described plaques the motifs of birds, lions, and horsemen (combined equine and human elements) appear together in a single composition. And thus we have yet another parallel with the Nidajno assemblage.

The votive plaques dedicated to the Thracian Rider use a similar form (and iconographic elements), in spite of being related to a cult originating from a different tradition and an unrelated development (Szabó, Á. 2017, 130–132). The following terms are used in literature – the Thracian Rider, the Thracian Hero (*Heroes*), Hunter on Horseback. The deity presented in such form and regarded as iconic for Thracian culture was revered under various names, with the universally used appellation “Thracian” referring to its area of origin. Presentations of the Thracian Rider encountered outside of Thrace (e.g., in Pannonia or Dacia) are linked with the presence of Thracian soldiers in Roman units and with a Thracian diaspora (Boteva 2011, 85; Szabó, C. 2016; Szabó, C., Boda 2019, 67). A prevailing majority of *vota* and stellae are dated to the between the middles of the 2nd and 3rd centuries, with the chronology of some artefacts reaching into the 4th century (Boteva 2011, 87–88, 94).

Thracians, as may be inferred from inscriptions on votive presentations, addressed the Rider as “master/lord” or “*heroes*”; there are no sources pointing to the Rider occupying the highest position in the Thracian pantheon. In spite of the impressive number of preserved presentations the place and importance of the Thracian Rider in the system of local beliefs and practices remains unclear (Boteva 2011, 86; 2016, 314). The high iconographic variation of the Rider’s depictions on *vota* is perceived as resulting not only from being made at different workshops, but foremost from being an expression of personalized narratives held by the faithful, possibly a sign of religious individualization (Boteva 2011, 96–97)⁴⁶.

The votive plaques and stellae from the Roman Empire period doubtless reflect native Thracian beliefs. On plaques the form enclosed by an arch or tympanum has the same shape as grave stellae bearing the depiction of the Rider (Boteva-Boyanova 2006, 14–16). The spectrum of Thracian

45 The iconography on the *vota* attests to the Romanization of the formal features of the cult, naturally associated with the parallel Romanization of the faithful. It is difficult to identify the background of the scenes including the pictogram figures and decipher its original symbology. Although individual scenes are – at first glance – constructed using the same principles, actually the collection of artefacts from over three centuries includes many variations, possibly illustrating the evolution of the cult and its practices and its reflection in the manner of depicting figures (Szabó, Á. 2017, 98–99).

46 Characteristic elements of the cult of the Thracian Rider, i.e., the small number of epigraphic sources, large number of sepulchral presentations, broad topographic spread of the finds, and small dimensions of *vota*, combined with the small sizes of the shrines in Thrace suggest that the cult was highly individualistic. In the literature two of its aspects are focused upon – the Thracian and the military, with a close connection to the *dii patrii* of Thracian soldiers. According to Csaba Szabó one should be wary of interpretations of those aspects of the cult which “seemingly overcame its ethnic confines and gained regional, supra-provincial and supra-ethnic popularity” (Boteva 2011, 86; Szabó, C. 2016, 64–66).

Rider presentations is quite broad. The least elaborate presents him together with two animals, one of which – almost invariably a hound (sporadically replaced with lion) – is a companion, while the other is prey: usually a wild boar, but also a hare, deer, or bear. Another simple presentation is that of the Rider alongside a bull assaulted by a lion. More elaborate scenes show a wild boar being hunted in the presence of a snake; a female figure and a deer as sacrifice; or the Rider accompanied by two women and a man. Yet another aspect of these designs was pointed out by Dilyana Boteva, who drew attention to depictions from Bulgaria showing the Thracian Rider with friezes (under the main field of the relief on votive plaques) presenting various combinations of fighting animals: a hound attacking a wild boar, a hound attacking a deer / doe, or a lion/lioness attacking a bull (the lack of eagles or other birds is not without meaning). The prominent position of such an “animalistic frieze” indicates its salient role in the composition of the entire scene, although its meaning eludes us. Nevertheless, it should be mentioned that similar friezes are regularly found on reliefs related with the cult of Mithras and the Danubian Horsemen (Ill. 101: a–b; Boteva 2016, 310–312). The Thracian Rider’s iconography includes symbols probably used as ideograms for religious terms – the local roots of many of these are attested by the imagery of a horseman and snake (occasionally a woman), which appear in Thracian toreutics already in the 5th – 4th centuries BC (Boteva-Boyanova 2006, 14–16).



Ill. 101. Votive stellae with Horse-rider motif: a – Lozen, Bulgaria; b – Glava Panega, Bulgaria (Boteva 2016, ill. 1, 3); c – plaque from sheet from Krakovany-Stráže, Slovakia, burial 2 (Quast 2009a, ill. 73: 1)

In this context it is worth mentioning images analogous to the classic depiction of the Thracian Rider with raised spear (see Boteva 2016, 315, pl. 1). A variant of this motif is the – already mentioned in the context of astral motifs – decorated fragment of the embossed plaque from Krakovany-Stráže, burial 2, with a horse-rider holding a spear in his raised right hand, and in

his left – a standard topped with a crescent (Ill. 101: c). This depiction had been interpreted as influenced by Sarmatian presentations and motifs with Hellenistic roots and developed in areas to the north of the Black Sea (Przybyła 2018, 542, ill. 16/25: 5; further literature there). However, judging by the sizeable number and popularity of Thracian Rider imagery in Danubian provinces, in areas definitely geographically closer to Krakovany-Stráže (western Slovakia), its genetic connection to this motif should be rated as more probable. As already pointed out, the depiction of the horse-rider on the plaque from Krakovany-Stráže shares with the Nidajno *gryllos* an analogous composition of three triangles with sharp ends pointed towards one another, their tips crowned with astral elements.

The image of the Rider dominates funeral/sepulchral iconography in Dacia Superior and Dacia Porolissensis. Such funeral/sepulchral presentations were preferred in military milieu, *auxilia* in particular, but in those areas they gradually spread to the civilian population, as well. Also visible are preferences of certain socio-professional groups, as well as local styles and traditions leaving different marks on zonal sepulchral iconography. The Rider motif, just as that of the banquet, was interpreted as including scenes in which the deceased is ascribed heroic attributes. In Antiquity the pairing of a horse and rider was widespread in presentations of deities: *Dioscuri*, Thracian Rider, Danubian Horsemen, as well as Mithras are *heroes* or gods who fight evil from horseback. Sepulchral/funerary statues with an equestrian image of the deceased probably reflect a similar concept and thus were popular in the milieu of mounted troops from the *auxilia* stationed on the Rhine-Danubian *limes* – over time giving rise to a fashion embraced by the locals. It is worth adding that the depictions of the Rider on grave stellae are combined in various manners with elements of sepulchral iconography such as the rosette, crown, garland, grapevine vines, grape clusters, *kantharos*, hippocampus, dolphins, birds, bucranium, head of the Medusa, Eros, and Attis (Nemeti, I. 2019, 291–292, 296).

It has been noted that the image of the Rider as a funeral symbol appeared only in the repertoire of workshops in Dacia Superior and Dacia Porolissensis⁴⁷. In contrast with the provinces to the south of the Danube (Moesia, Thracia), in Dacia Porolissensis the main motifs were: “Heroes standing in front of horse” and “Heroes in *epiphania*”, with the following types lacking: “Heroes-hunter” and “Heroes-soldier, with foe lying on the ground” (Nemeti, I., Nemeti, S. 2014, 241–242). In sum, it is worth noting that the effect of cultural relations in the Thracian provinces of the Empire produced a certain syncretization that is visible in the modification of religious motifs, and apparent in the combining of the *heroes* with foreign deities or equipping deities with local attributes (e.g., an equestrian Zeus or Dionysus; Boteva-Boyanova 2012, 42).

47 There are more examples of regional differences in this respect, e.g., the motif of “Heroes-hunter” in the Balkan-Danubian zone and “Heroes-soldier, with foe lying on ground” in the Rhine zone.

5.5. Conclusions

The above analysis points out the strong connotations connecting the iconographic content of finds from the Nidajno assemblage with motifs decorating various categories of items of Roman origin. Iconographic parallels between the finds from Nidajno and Roman art may be seen on elements of armour and weapons, everyday use items, mosaics, and wall paintings. This concerns four main artefact categories:

- elements of personal military effects and armament (elements of military belts, horse tack, parade armour such as helmets, greaves or chanfrons);
- certain groups of items and presentations related with the spiritual (items related with military and civilian cults such as votive sheet and plaques as well as figurines);
- some types of ostentatious metal tableware;
- gemmae, with magical properties (apotropaic).

The shared motifs aligning the decoration of Nidajno assemblage artefacts with elements of Roman art: palmetto (“tree of life”), *gryllos*, *aedicula*, astral elements, stretched animal hide, hippocampus, animal chase motif (real animals and mythological beasts) and zoomorphic patterns (lions, birds, and fish).

It is possible to discern connections between particular motifs and categories of items they were used on:

- animal chase and military equipment, with this motif, rooted in Hellenistic (from Black Sea region) and Thracian traditions, appearing on Roman personal military equipment in the 1st century AD already, as indicated by cingula fittings of type B.4.a acc. Hoss and gladius scabbards;
- stretched animal hide and military equipment: on shields, fittings of military belts, chanfrons. This context may also include presentations related with gladiatorial combat, i.e., amphitheatre frescoes and crustulum from *Viminacium*. In a broader context – pendants-amulets were made in the shaped of stretched hides;
- palmetto (leaf of palm tree) and votive silver and gold plaques from the 3rd century and encountered along the Roman *limes*.
- The assemblage of decorations from Nidajno is defined by the following features:
- having been made from precious metals (high finesse gold and silver; see Nowakiewicz ed. 2016a);

- the number of items (multi-element sets of stylistically consistent decorations);
- the advanced crafting techniques (amalgamation, soldering, and gilding techniques, niello, large number of stamps; see Nowakiewicz ed. 2016a);
- the extensive, unconventional, and sophisticated repertoire of figurative motifs, drawing upon themes deeply rooted in the Empire's heterogeneous tradition;
- the additional prestigious elements accompanying the analyzed stylistically homogeneous items (gold fittings of parade sword, sword pendant, vulture or eagle figurine, glass chalice from Syrian workshop), emphasizing the status-communicating character of the assemblage/set (and thus also the imagery used in decorations, taken from the Roman imaginarium).

The wealth of employed motifs and their creative combinations on elements of personal equipment (belts and horse harnesses) not only proves the maker's artistic creativity and imagination, but probably also testifies to – and is the bearer – of some more profound idea. I do not see the depictions decorating the assemblage from Nidajno as a simple combination of patterns and designs copied from the catalogue of canonical ornaments, but as bespeaking an arrangement in line with the customer's and future user's preferences. The zoomorphic presentations give the impression of being part of some more elaborate narrative – at the present stage of research, one not yet fully legible to us. These multiple layers of possible interpretations extend to the individualized anthropomorphic presentation, the *gryllos*.

The fragmentation and the incompleteness of the assemblage generates its own set of interpretation issues. Nevertheless it seems that the largest impact on the content (and thus symbolism) of ornamentation were decorations of the elite's military equipment and imagery from cult-related presentations known from Roman military centres and their surroundings along the Rhine-Danube *limes*.

The use of the animal chase motif, the selection of species (lion, birds, fish, dolphin, capricorn, hippocampus, and gryphons), the manner of presenting the dragon based upon the Roman *dracō*, and the stretched hide motif point towards the strongest connection being with elements of parade panoply (including both dress and equipment – principally officers' belts and their horses harnesses) and Roman military standards.

A unique arrangement is the placement of the *gryllos* inside the *aedicula* – the place typically reserved for the deity or hero. This is not an element alien to military iconography, but it is extremely rarely seen, appearing only on Barbarian made items, even though directly influenced by the *limes* milieu from the Middle Danube (facings of Herpály shield-boss and sheet from the Osztrópataka-Ostrovany saddle).

The form of the palmetto fitting has close connotations with cultic votive plaques shaped like a palmetto or palm leaf. The placement of the *gryllos* in the *aedicula* and the arrangement of the

accompanying elements suggests that it is not an *equal* of the remaining elements: the crown of the “tree of life” (sky element?), the hippocampus on the hide of the killed animal (chthonic element?), it is *superior* to them. The special importance of the *gryllos* was additionally underscored by the astral motif suggestive of its divine status, allowing for speculation that it depicts a deity, the overlord of a world represented by the remaining presentations of the design. Such an interpretation might be supported by the form of the item: regardless of how the fitting was used (probably as chamfron on a horse’s headpiece, or a pendant somewhere on a horse’s harness), the *gryllos* will be appropriately positioned – this in contrast to the hippocampus, tree crown, and birds. The doubled equine motif of the palmetto may be perceived as having some sort of connection with depictions of the Danubian Horsemen and the Thracian Rider known from votive plaques and grave stellae (and accompanied by numerous zoomorphic patterns, including that of the animal chase). The accumulation and bringing together of the listed elements may have served to reinforce the apotropaic role of the item.

The gathered material on possible inspirations points to the above-mentioned elements being most probably brought together in the 3rd century in provinces along the Middle Danube, specifically in Dacia, Moesia, and Pannonia. The iconographic and stylistic features of the assemblage suggest it was crafted in a workshop making up part of the *limes* military milieu.

This is not contradicted by the compositional aspect of the palmetto crown and animal chase, pointing to the maker of the assemblage (or its designer), who drew further inspiration from the motifs used to decorate metal vessels (Eggers serving plates type 121) and Hemmoor type buckets. Such items were manufactured mostly during the 1st half of the 3rd century at provincial workshops in Gaul or along the Rhine, appearing in larger number along the Middle Danube only in the mid-3rd century together with units redeployed from the Rhenish provinces.

There is a degree of probability that the assemblage of items from Nidajno – with their strongly accented military symbolism, not free from sacral aspects (legionary military cults) – had been commissioned by a Roman officer, possibly a veteran of the *auxilia* stationed along the Middle Danube. The evidently “equine” motif on the palmetto and identification of the purpose or function of several other prestigious items (strap divider, element of headpiece, silver buckle, and silver spur) give grounds to the assumption that their owner had been a rider.

The ornamentation of the Nidajno assemblage must have been to the taste of Barbarians in contact with provincial Roman areas (as indicated by e.g., two fittings in the same style from Wrocław-Zakrzów, burial III). Various figurative motifs (zoomorphic in particular) had been adopted by Barbarian artisans somewhere around the middle of the 3rd century and became an attractive manner of expressing content going beyond the decorative. This is how we should view the facings of the shield-boss from Herpály, the plaques from Osztrópataka-Ostrovany or discs and the plaque from Thorsberg etc., whose figurative motifs are inspired by provincial Roman wares from the Imperial period. Such items communicated the owner’s high and supra-re-

gional status, highlighting how “exceptional” they were (see Blankenfeldt 2015a; 2015b, 48–49; Pesch 2015; Przybyła 2018). Yet one should point out that, although in iconographic terms the above-mentioned items are close to the Nidajno fittings, the major stylistic and crafting differences between them preclude their assignment to a single group. The Nidajno assemblage evidently belongs among products from Roman provincial workshops.

I consider the assemblage from Nidajno to be evidence of a broader and more complex process. The patterns and motifs used there had been adopted by the *Barbaricum*: these were imitated and adapted by local workshops in order to supply local elites. The preferences of such high status individuals were of key importance in the popularization of figurative art in Barbarian society. It is highly likely that at least in some cases Barbarian workshops used original Roman tools, the production process probably occasionally also involving Roman artisans. These factors added to the differentiation and individualization of the designs and motifs as seen in various examples of Barbarian imitative art.

Generally speaking, in Late Antiquity the Roman manner of presenting animals does not seem to be that distant from Germanic sensibilities. This is doubtlessly connected with the contact between those two worlds – intensifying, as it did, every decade during the 3rd, 4th and 5th centuries AD. In effect during the twilight years of the Empire, Roman iconographic language was well understood by Germanic tribesmen – both those from beyond the *limes* as well as those who had been Roman citizens for generations already. Roman iconography evolved in reaction to changing circumstances which did not eliminate the still understandable zoomorphic decorations (also as to its styling conventions). This made the motifs live on, even though in their semantic message archaic ideas of animal powers were replaced by new cultural and religious context (Hunter 2009, 799; Pesch 2015, 531).

6. Analysis of selected accompanying finds

Besides the specimens sharing a uniform style, and evidently comprising a complete set of fittings, the collection of parade items from Nidajno may also be deemed to include some non-standard – and in some cases simply unique – items. Their analysis in the context of the examined problem area leads to interesting observations.

6.1. Gold sword fitting

The two gold fittings of a parade sword are outstanding – the scabbard throat and cross-guard fittings (nos. 11, 12)¹ – as they are lavishly ornamented with floral, zoomorphic, and stamped motifs. The latter is particularly interesting. The stamp – concave with a central point – was not used on any other fittings from the assemblage. The cross-guard fitting is accompanied by the decorative elements of the panels, made by the deep embossing method: a cymation² and alternatively placed triangles and reversed triangles.

Although the characteristic pattern of an almond-shaped (*mandelförmig*³) stamp is perceived as being typical of the Sösdala and Untersiebenbrunn styles from the early Migration Period (Quast 2017, 285–286), it has deeper going roots. It was used in the decorations of items from burial III at Wrocław-Zakrzów and dated to the final three decades of the 3rd century: the frames of two (of four) gold buckles⁴ and a silver, gilded fitting with presentations of a bird of prey and a deer (Quast 2009a, 37, ill. 56: 1; 50, ill. 73: 6). This pattern is also visible in stamped geometric ornamentation decorating the fittings of Roman officers' belts, popular in the Empire along the Middle Danube (e.g., Nagyberki-Szalacskapuszta, Hungary, Wrocław-Zakrzów, burial III) in the final decades of the 3rd century (Quast 2009a, 37, ill. 56: 8), or the box-like sword scabbard chapes (e.g., *Augusta Vindelicum* / Augsburg, Switzerland). In these cases the “lenses” were made with the so-called *Zirkelschlagmotive* – where two circles overlap (see Mráv 2010; 2011). On the reconstructed parade belt from the “princely” burial at Gommern, Germany (stage C₂; 2nd half of

1 These fittings and the sword bead (No. 13) are the subject of a separate, detailed work (in preparation).

2 This motif was used to decorate the side panels of the scabbard excavated at *Vindonissa* showing the scene of Oedipus and the Sphinx which, owing to its finely made relief, may be dated to the time of Augustus. A cymation is also found on a cingula from the Bay of Naples and a shield from the Tiberius era signum from Niederbieber (Künzl, E. 1998, 418, ill. 17:2, pl. 50:1–6).

3 A term introduced by Wilhelm Kubitschek, who discovered the burials at Untersiebenbrunn (Quast 2017, 286).

4 The frames of the other two were decorated with circles, and their prongs with concave stamps (and *vice versa* – frames decorated with concave stamps were combined with prongs decorated with circles; Grempler 1888, 12, pl. VII: 17, 18).

3rd century) such a pattern was applied onto gilded leather rosettes assembled from six such concave elements (Becker 2000, 134–137; 2010, ill. 11, 16, pl. 62: 2, 63: 3). In later times concave stamps were widely used on Sösdala and Untersiebenbrunn style items⁵, as well as – combined with other elements – on early 5th century Velp type necklaces from today's Netherlands (Quast 2009b, 217–220; 2017, 287)⁶. In light of the above, the gold fittings of the Nidajno sword maybe be regarded to one of the earlier examples of the use of concave stamp ornamentation, or that references the style of *limes* zone silver fittings of military swords from the 2nd half of the 3rd and early 4th centuries.

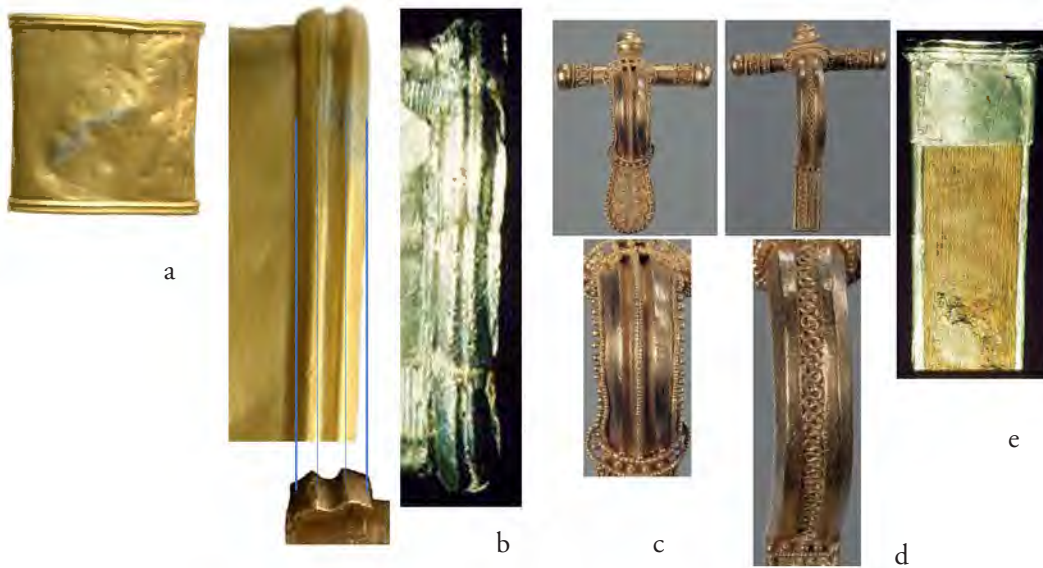
The overall concept of the appearance and utility of the Nidajno sword fittings aligns with the arrangements used in the fittings of a sword scabbard of a Roman officer excavated at a lavishly equipped burial from the *ingentia auxilia Germanorum* at the Roman city of *Durostorum* on the Danube (Silistra, Bulgaria; Dumanov 2005; Dumanov, Bachvarov 2010; see Atanasov 2001; 2007; 2014; ill. 102)⁷.



Ill. 102. Sword and scabbard from burial of a Roman officer from *Durostorum* / Silistra, Bulgaria: a – reconstruction of usage; b–c – the obverse and reverse of the scabbard (Dumanov 2013, ill. 38, 41, 42)

- 5 At many presentations of Nidajno finds some participants of the discussion were inclined to date the set of gold sword fittings to the early Migration Period.
- 6 For this reason Dieter Quast suggested to name this cultural horizon Sösdala-Untersiebenbrunn-Velp, with provision for regional variants (Quast 2009b; 2017).
- 7 This inhumation burial contained, among other objects, two swords, elements of two shields, the already mentioned silver cingulum, and a gold onion-shaped fibula, dubbed *Kaiserfibel* (Dumanov 2005).

The fittings of the *Durostorum* sword scabbard draw upon the Bosporan and Late Sarmatian Polychromic style which in the 2nd half of the 3rd century had spread to the Lower Danube. Besides the exceptionally rich decorations, attention is also attracted by the panel on the upper edge of the scabbard throat fitting, made in a die and with a cross-section identical to the panel on the upper edge of the fitting from Nidajno (Ill. 103: a–b). A similar element may be seen in the arches of two gilded, parade fibulae from the princely burial no. I at Osztrópataka-Ostrovany (Slovakia), dated to the 2nd half of the 3rd century (Prohászka 2006; Ill. 103: c–d).



Ill. 103. a – details of the gold fittings of the scabbard throat from Nidajno (Photo M. Bogacki); b – detail of scabbard throat fitting from *Durostorum* / Silistra, Bulgaria (Геров 1985); c–d – gold fibulae from burial I from Osztrópataka-Ostrovany, Slovakia (<https://www.khm.at/objektdb/detail/71203/?offset=4&lv=list>, <https://www.khm.at/objektdb/detail/71200/?offset=9&lv=list>, accessed on: 03.01.2021)

There are more such associations between the materials from Osztrópataka-Ostrovany and Nidajno. One being the details of the onyx-decorated “Imperial fibula” from burial I at Osztrópataka-Ostrovany (Ill. 104: b): the unique (with no analogies) lotus-shaped floral pendants (Ill. 105: b), reminiscent of the most-repeated pattern on the fitting of the Nidajno scabbard throat.



Ill. 104. a – gold fitting of the sword scabbard throat from Nidajno (Photo M. Bogacki); b – “Imperial fibula” with onyx from burial I at Osztrópataka-Ostrovany, Slovakia (Kunsthistorisches Museum Wien, <https://www.khm.at/objektdb/detail/71194/?offset=9&lv=list>, accessed on: 21.08.2020)



a

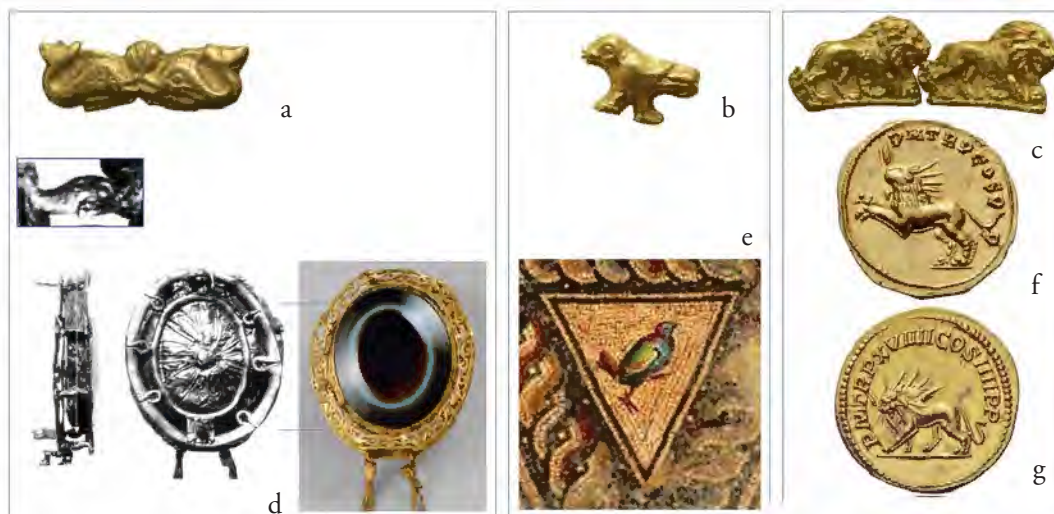


b

Ill. 105. a – gold fitting of the sword scabbard throat from Nidajno, detail (Photo M. Bogacki); b – “Imperial fibula” with onyx from burial I at Osztrópataka-Ostrovany, Slovakia, detail (Kunsthistorisches Museum Wien, <https://www.khm.at/objektdb/detail/71194/?offset=9&lv=list>, accessed on: 21.08.2020)

Another element linking the assemblage of Nidajno fittings with the Osztrópataka-Ostrovany fibula are the presentations of dolphins, even though they serve different functions: on the cross-guard fitting these decorate the exposed elements of the item, while in the fibula they comprise an

element of its construction, connecting its various parts. The depictions of birds and very finely detailed lions (with the quality of make comparable with the highest quality mint stamps⁸; Ill. 106: d) draw upon widespread Roman utilitarian art, without analogies in the *Barbaricum*.

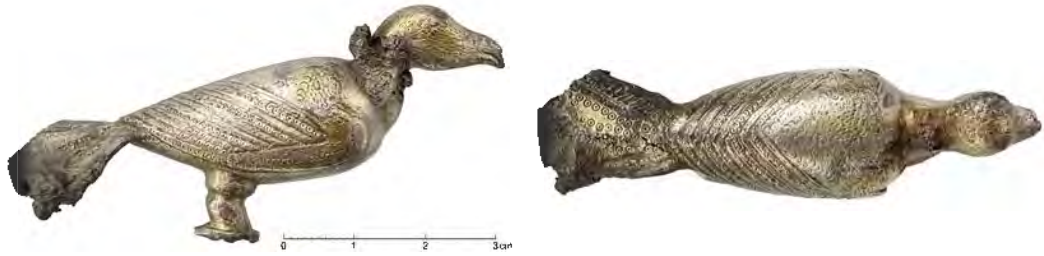


Ill. 106. Comparison of zoomorphic details of the gold sword fittings from Nidajno: a – dolphins; b – birds; c – lions (Photo M. Bogacki) with motifs on: d – “Imperial fibula” from burial I at Osztrópataka-Ostrovany, Slovakia (Kunsthistorisches Museum Wien, <https://www.khm.at/objektdb/detail/71194/?offset=9&lv=list>, accessed on: 21.08.2020); e – fragment of mosaic at *Marcianopolis / Devnya*, Bulgaria (<https://www.facebook.com/therusticbulgarianvilla/photos/2389615504606056>; accessed on: 20.11.2019); f – aureus coin of Emperor Caracalla (<https://www.numisbids.com/n.php?p=lot&sid=2776&lot=259>; accessed on: 30.09.2021); g – aureus coin of Emperor Aurelian (<https://www.numisbids.com/n.php?p=lot&sid=1979&lot=32>; accessed on: 30.09.2021)

6.2. Bird figurine

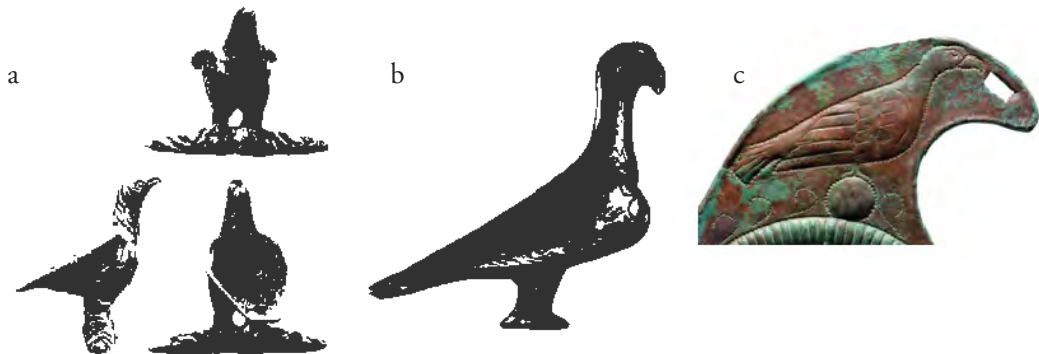
Although the stylistic features of the silver, gilded bird figurine (no. 14) identified as a vulture or an eagle (Ill. 107) are not consistent with the style of the fittings, it nevertheless was crafted with the same gold working techniques.

⁸ An observation made by Prof. Aleksander Bursche from the Faculty of Archaeology, University of Warsaw.



Ill. 107. Figurine of bird of prey from Nidajno: right side and top views (Photo M. Osiadacz)

Thus, it may be perceived as having been used to convey the same idea which gave us the Roman eagle. The roots of the role of eagles as a symbol of strength go back to Indo-European times, when it became the attribute of the primary god of the Proto-Indo-European pantheon – Dīaus (later known in Greece as Zeus, and in Rome as Jupiter/Jove, archaically – *Diouis pater*). In Roman religion the eagle remained an attribute of Jupiter, his messenger, and as a symbol of his strength it became the emblematic symbol of Roman legions (Ill. 108: c). Over time in the Empire the eagle became an attribute of the Emperor in his capacity as head of the army, and finally a universal symbol of the whole State. The Legions' eagles (*aquilae*) were wholly cast from silver or gold (also in gilded bronze), though no examples have survived to verify this. Preserved descriptions point to *aquilae*, in spite of following certain styling conventions that probably differ in minor details (Töpfer 2011).



Ill. 108. a – bronze figurine of an eagle from the Moselle river, Trier, Germany (Faust 2006, 173, no. 30); b – silver figurine of an eagle from Gurzufskoe Sedlo pass, Crimea, Ukraine (Новиченкова, Н.Г. 1998, 58, ill. 8); c – depiction of an eagle atop a globe, decoration from brow-band discovered in Danube river near Komárom, Hungary (Mráv 2021, ill. 2)

The Nidajno figurine lacks formal analogies, although it shows similarities with the eagle found in the Moselle river at Trier (h. 3.35 cm, width of the lightning-bolt 3.7 cm). The bird, with depicted feathers, folded wings, and raised head, is mounted on a stylized lightning-bolt. The figurine could not stand and must have been soldered (flat bottom of the lightning) to some other object (Ill. 108: a; Faust 2006, 173, no. 30). A similar find comes from the shrine on the Gurzufskoe Sedlo mountain pass in Crimea where an amount of objects related with martial cults and silver or bronze statuettes of Greco-Roman deities, along with two figurines of animals were discovered – namely, a horse (bronze) and an eagle (silver – 4.5 cm in height). These figurines are interpreted as parts of a Roman military unit's ensigns (*signa*). The shrine was in use from the 1st century BC to the early 2nd century AD (Ill. 108: b; Новиченкова, Н.Г. 1998, 58, ill. 8)⁹.

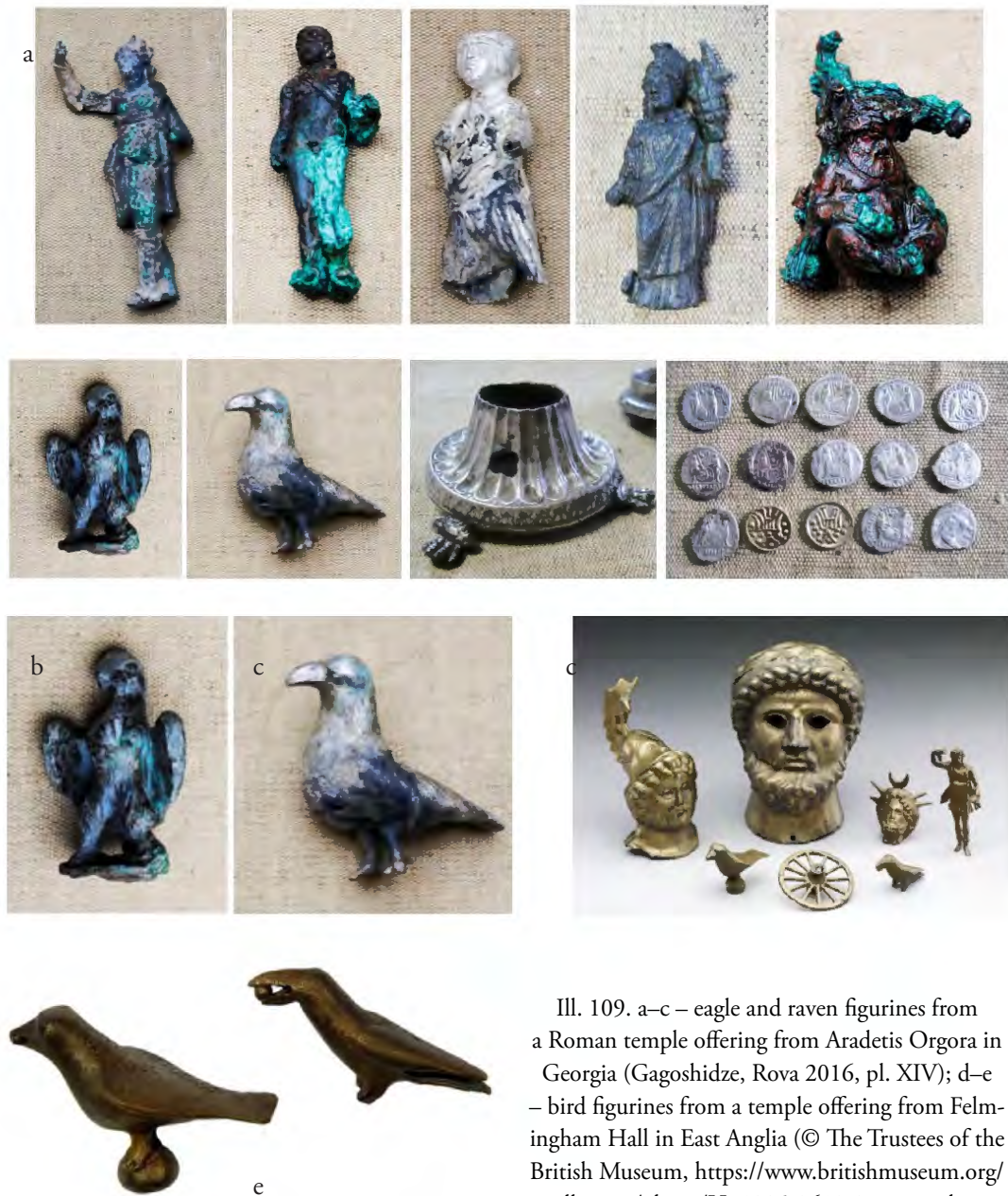
In some instances bird figurine finds from Roman provinces may be assigned a particular function – this applies to raven figurines discovered in a votive/sacrificial context. One example is the deposit of bronze figurines at Felmingham Hall (East Anglia) – probably a temple hoard from the middle of the 3rd century – representing Minerva, Jupiter, Helios, and Lares as well as two bird figurines and a model of a spoked wheel. The bird figurines were evidently originally mounted on some unidentified objects (*Roman Britain* 1964; Gilbert 1978; Potter 1997: 78, pl. 72; Hobbs, Jackson 2010; ill. 109: d–e), likely to the tips of sceptres, maces, or priestly crowns used for religious processions which, as suggested by the significant number of similar finds¹⁰, were a widespread element of the cultural and religious traditions of that province (Henig 2005, 124, 127–128, ill. 62).

On that basis it is theorized that the richly decorated bird figurine from Nidajno is some form of ideological imitation of the Roman *aquila*. This is implied by the metal shaft making it usable as a *signum*, an allusion to Imperial Roman ideology yet understandable to Barbarian users. Another possibility is that – if it was not some sort of unique formal experiment, and not based upon Roman made items, then it was inspired by the widely understood Eastern Zone, e.g., the Pontic and North Caucasus. This theory is supported by finds from the Caucasian kingdom of Iberia (with its capital in the Shida Kartli region of central Georgia), pointing towards the animated contact of this area with both the Roman civilization to its west, as well as the Iranian culture to its east (with signs of growing Roman influence and weakening Parthian influence; Gagoshidze, Rova 2016, 19–20). The ruins of the palace at Aradetis Orgora yielded silver and bronze, gilded Roman statuettes (dated to the 1st century AD) deposited (together with a diadem from gold leaves and 15 coins) in an incense bowl on a clay fire altar. The statuettes – evidently a temple offering – represented Artemis, Apollo, Leto, Tyche-Fortuna, Selena, and a dolphin, raven, and eagle (Gagoshidze, Rova 2016, 22; ill. 109: a–c). The silver eagle figurine, probably a local copy

9 See the fitting with the motif of an animal chase/hunt from that temple (see above, Chapter 5).

10 In this context one may also mention a figurine of an owl-like bird (5.5 cm height) from Willingham Fen (East Anglia) performing similar functions (Gilbert 1978).

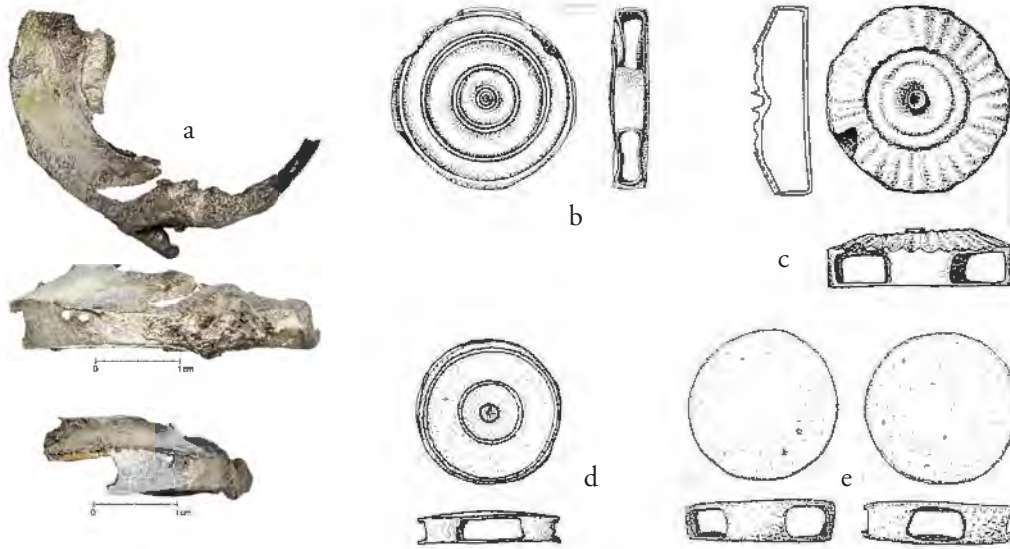
of a Roman *aquila*, is quite successful in imitating Roman art, whereas the silver and gilded raven figurine – just as the vulture/eagle from Nidajno – present a realistic presentation of the animal (Gagoshidze, Rova 2016, pl. XIV: a).



Ill. 109. a–c – eagle and raven figurines from a Roman temple offering from Aradetis Orgora in Georgia (Gagoshidze, Rova 2016, pl. XIV); d–e – bird figurines from a temple offering from Felmingham Hall in East Anglia (© The Trustees of the British Museum, https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/H_1925-0610-8, accessed on: 13.06.2020)

6.3. Box phalera

The heavily damaged and fragmentarily preserved silver, gilded phalera (no. 15) includes the remains of two rectangular, widely separated openings (next to one there are two additional small holes; Ill. 110: a). Roman box phalerae, known from military contexts along the Rhine and Danube *limes*, usually possess three or four such openings along their periphery, the functional (“working”) element of the harness. These are made from bronze or iron: at present no examples from precious metals are known (Ill. 110: b–e; Nicolay 2007, 50–51; Lau 2014a, 168–169; there further literature).



Ill. 110. a – silver phalera from Nidajno (Photo M. Osiadacz); Roman box phalerae (strap divider, bronze) from 2nd half of 2nd – 1st half the 3rd century: b – Dambach, Germany; c – Ellingen, Germany; d–e – *Abusina* / Eining, Germany (Lau 2014a, ill. 109)

The features of the Nidajno phalera, especially the use of silver as a material, the gilding, and probably only two openings for the straps, point to strong ties with eastern workshops from the North Pontic group, the producers of parade bridles and horse harnesses (with analogous phalerae) found at richly equipped Sarmatian Burials discovered along the northern and north-western shores of the Black Sea (Map 3). Their decorative/parade use is suggested by the material used and the decoration of the exposed, upper surface with semi-precious stones, at times accompanied by the use of pressed gold sheet (*Pressblech*) as additional decoration around the stones. Of particular note is the use of only two and not four rectangular eyelets to pass the straps (Ill. 111; СИМОНЕНКО 2013, 228–231).

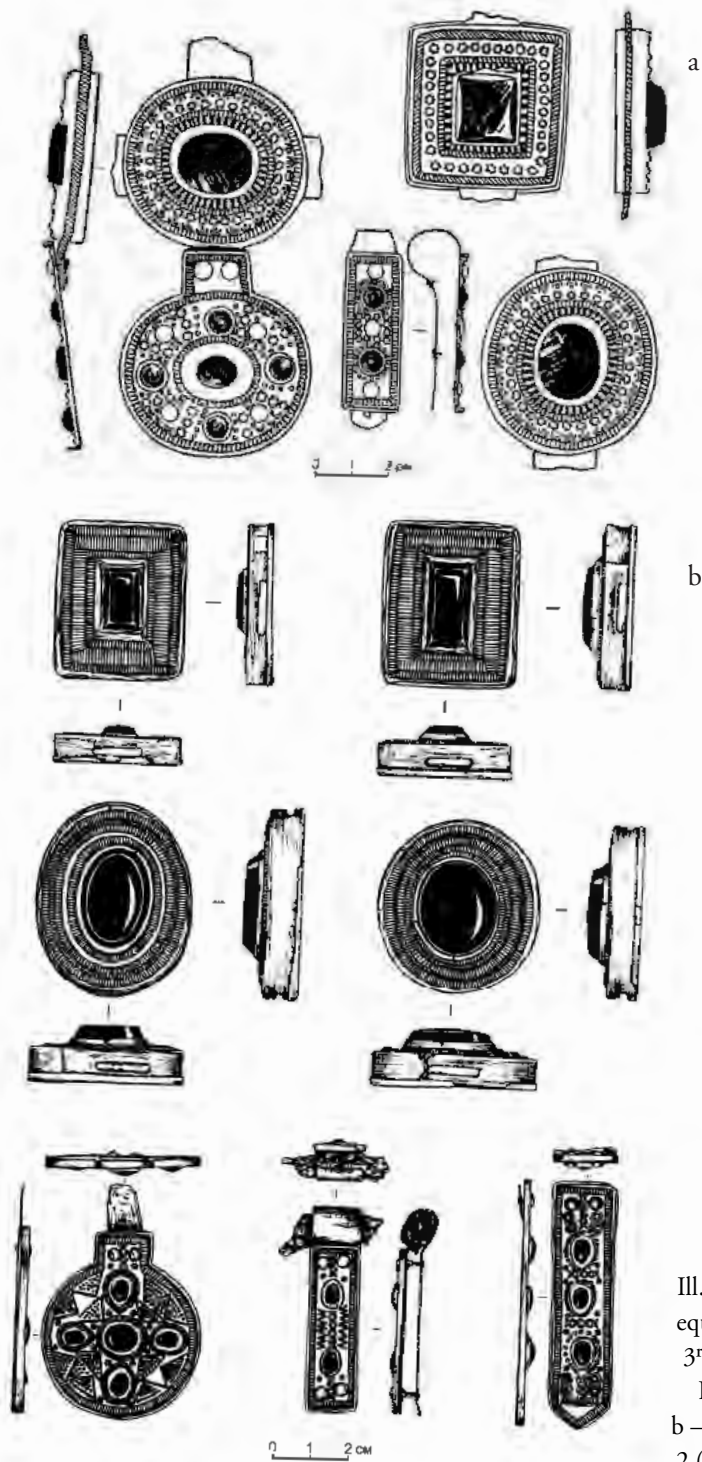


Map 3. Finds of Sarmatian box phalerae (by T. Nowakiewicz)

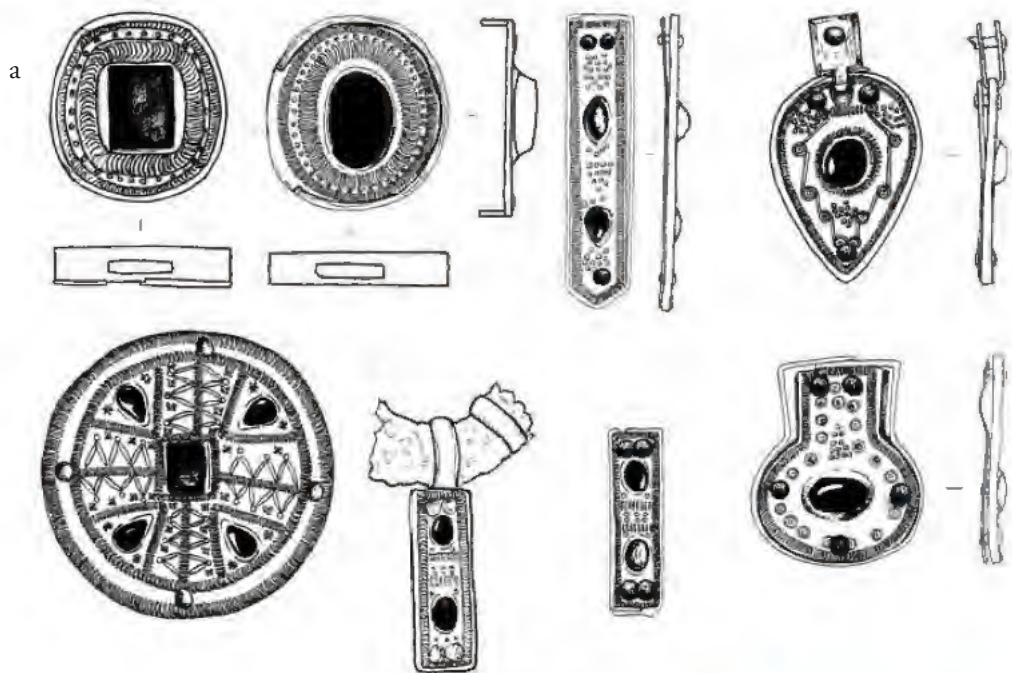
Sets of horse bridles similar to those mentioned above belong to early examples of the “Polychromic style”, developed at Late Sarmatian gold-working workshops¹¹. The leitmotif of this very visually impressive style was the setting of semi-precious stones (usually dark red garnet, or a variant from this mineral group – almandine) or pieces of coloured glass into gold sheet or plate. As a result, the entire surface was more or less regularly incrustated, with the contrastive colours of the stones, glass, and gold – combined with granulation and filigree between the insets – offering a striking decorative effect.

Horse harnesses and bridles decorated in the Polychromic style are known from the late period of Roman influence (2nd half of 3rd – early 4th centuries) from Late Sarmatian cemeteries e.g., from Chausch near the Danube estuary (Ukraine), from Aerodrom-1 and Komarov-2 on the lower Don, from Kishpek in the North Caucasus and from Burials of Bosphoran elites from *Panticapaeum* (Kerch in Crimea). The manner of their creation indicates their placement in one of two groups: Sarmatian (Chausch, Aerodrom-1, Kishpek; ill. 112) or Bosphoran (Komarov-2 and Burials at *Panticapaeum*; ill. 113; Šarov 2003; Засецкая, Шаров 2008; Симоненко 2013). All are representative of the Late Roman Polychromic style, the roots of which are identified in e.g., Late Sarmatian jewellery (Яценко, Малашев 2000; Bârcă, Symonenko 2009; Симоненко 2013, 228–231).

¹¹ The Polychromic Style probably emerged in Asia, with the first examples of such objects so decorated being dated to the 1st half of the 2nd century, as discovered in Afghanistan. The style found its way to the Caucasus in the 2nd and 3rd centuries, whence through Colchid it reached the Pontic, thriving there in the 4th and early 5th centuries. A local variation of the Polychromic Style is the cloisonné technique, where cut and polished flat almandines are densely packed into deep compartments made from gold sheet (Bitner-Wróblewska, Pesch, Przybyła 2020; there further literature).



Ill. 111. Decorated phalerae from richly equipped Sarmatian burials (2nd half of 3rd – early 4th centuries): a – Kishpek, Kabardo-Balkaria, North Caucasus; b – Aerodrom I cemetery, Russia, barrow 2 (Симоненко 2013, ill. 6 [a]. ill. 5[b])



b



Ill. 112. a–b – phalerae and elements of
 bridle from Chausch on Lower Danube,
 Ukraine, barrow 5 (Симоненко 2013,
 ill. 1–3)



a

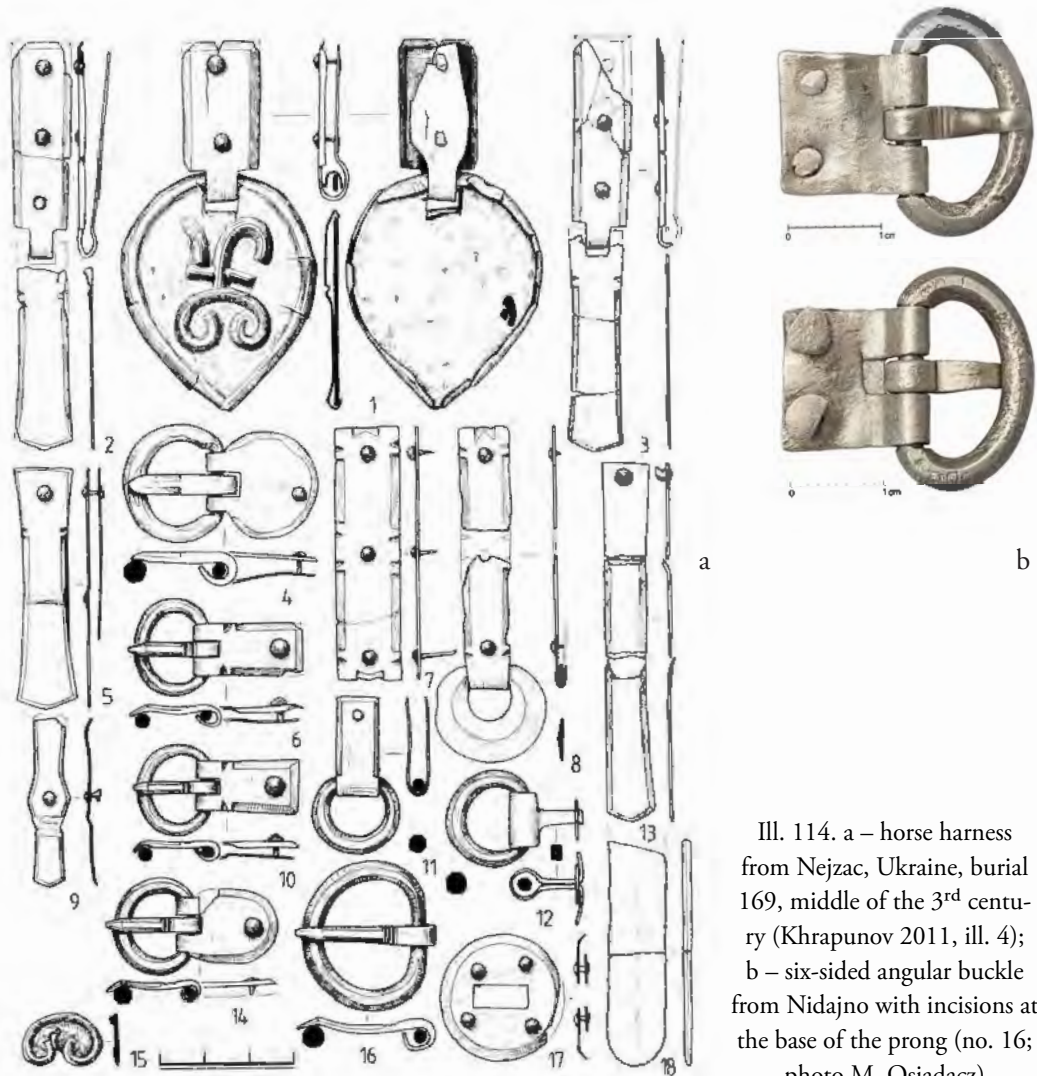


b

Ill. 113. Elements of the bridle from the cemetery Komarov-2 on Lower Don, 2nd half of 3rd – early 4th centuries (the Ermolay Zaporozhsky collection; СИМОНЕНКО 2013, ill. 7)

6.4. Buckle with angular-shaped frame

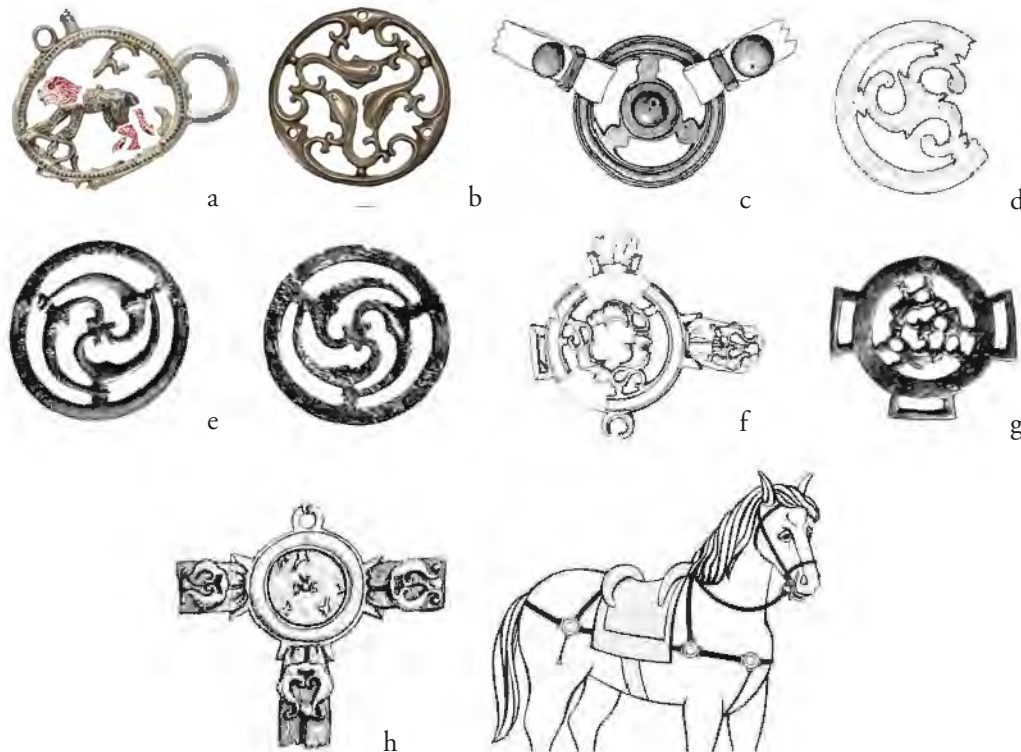
A small silver buckle with a six-sided, angular cross-section (no. 16) is similar to type H3 acc. Madyda-Legutko (1986). It resembles the buckles widely used in horse harnesses and bridles made in the “fasette style”, characteristic for Late Sarmatian workshops in the middle of the 3rd century. One example is that of finds from burial 169 at the Sarmatian cemetery at Nejzac in the Crimea (Ill. 114: a; Khrapunov 2011).



Ill. 114. a – horse harness from Nejzac, Ukraine, burial 169, middle of the 3rd century (Khrapunov 2011, ill. 4); b – six-sided angular buckle from Nidajno with incisions at the base of the prong (no. 16; photo M. Osiadacz)

6.5. Strap divider

A silver, originally gilded, openwork divider with three double eyelets for attaching leather straps (no. 10). The central part is decorated with a lion passant and vines motif. The upper surface of the arch is decorated with incrustation made of *niello* triangles? (Ill. 115: a). To the best of my knowledge, this item has no direct analogies, although it is possible that it may have been heavily inspired by openwork elements of Roman horse harnesses from the 2nd half of the 3rd and 1st half of the 4th centuries (so-called T-shaped Roman saddle strap dividers), e.g., from Tihany and Sárszentmiklós (Hungary), Niederbieber (Germany) or Celles (Belgium; Ill. 115: b–f; Lau 2014a). These sites share a military context, as they were located close to Roman military camps.



Ill. 115. a – silver strap divider from Nidajno (no. 10; photo M. Osiadacz; reconstruction T. Nowak-iewicz). Openwork Roman phalerae / saddle strap dividers: b–c – Tihany, Hungary; d – Niederbieber, Germany; e – Sárszentmiklós, Hungary. T-shaped Roman saddle strap dividers from 2nd half of 2nd or early 3rd centuries: f – Celles, Belgium; g – where this was found is unknown; h – Tirlmont, Belgium, barrow 1 and reconstruction (Lau 2014a, ill. 115 [c–e], 111 [f–h])

7. The purpose and usage of Nidajno fittings

As already mentioned, at the present state of research it is not possible to determine whether the elements of the Nidajno assemblage are the remains of a parade military belt or a particularly elaborate example of horse tack. Difficulties in differentiating between standardized elements of those two categories of finds are quite a common problem when dealing with Late Roman materials – particularly when pertaining to single finds or incomplete sets (Madyda-Legutko 2016, 611, 616–622, ill. 8; Lau 2014a)¹. Also worth keeping in mind is the overlap between the two categories, with fittings from one set being just as likely to once have been part of a rider's belt accessories or his mount's harness.

The styling and technological features of Nidajno fittings link them with an officer's *cingula* (gilded silver, exquisite *niello* ornament) found all along the *limes* in continental Europe, particularly around major military centres (e.g., at *Aquincum*, *Brigetio*, *Apulum*, *Durostorum*, *Aquileia* – today respectively Budapest and Szóny in Hungary, Alba Iulia in Romania, Silistra in Bulgaria, and Aquileia in Italy). The discoveries from the Middle Danube Provinces are dated to the 2nd half and end of the 3rd century (Horedt 1958, 22–23, ill. 3.1; Diaconescu 1999, 220–222, 240, ill. 12.40; Mráv 2010; 2011; Hoss 2017, 95–96, ill. 17). One of the more ostentatious examples of such belts comes from a burial at *Durostorum*, from the grave of a man identified by scholars as a Roman officer of Barbarian origin (Diaconescu 1999, 220–222). Silver fittings of such a belt have also been excavated at Wrocław-Zakrzów, in Burial III, in a set/assemblage including two zoomorphic fittings (ones already cited many times in this book) that are the closest analogies for Nidajno examples. This grave at Wrocław-Zakrzów is dated to the 2nd half of the 3rd century (phase C₂), probably from the reign of Aurelian, i.e., 270–275 AD (Madyda-Legutko 1986, 60–62; 2016, 613–614).

A Roman military belt (*cingulum militiae*, *cingulum militare*, *balteus*) was one of the most important elements of a soldier's equipment, as the scabbard of his sword was attached to it. The sword was the Legionnaire's main weapon and its loss was regarded as severely shaming. The weapon's relevance was extended to the belt itself, turning it into a symbol of strength and power². Military belts differed among themselves, in line with both changing fashions and the owner's

1 In the case of some finds, particularly those dated to the Late Roman Period, it also is difficult to distinguish between originals from Roman workshops and imitations made by Barbarian artisans (Bemmann 2003; Madyda-Legutko 2016, 616–622).

2 The symbolic relevance of military belts is supported by examples from other cultures. In the cultures of ancient Iran the belt was a physical symbol of the ties between a vassal and sovereign and used in investiture ceremonies (Hoss 2014, 63, 80–81). It performed similar functions in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages among Germanic societies. Over time this led to the emergence of various belt-related rituals integral to the code of chivalry.

rank and wealth. Most soldiers used simple leather belts with bronze or brass fittings, and these were often given a shiny tin-silver alloy coating. A few could afford luxurious specimens featuring bronze with silver gilding – along with enamel and *niello* decorations. Belts with fittings made from precious metals were very rare³. Regardless of its form, a military belt with metal fittings set regular Roman soldiers apart from the civilian population⁴ and was an expression of their group identity (Hoss 2014, 12–22; 2017). In the case of the most spectacular finds the very cost of the materials used to make them points to the user being a member of the military elite (centurion and higher), of a rank positioning him above the performance of menial tasks (Hoss 2014; 2017).

According to some scholars, belts with valuable fittings were not used in combat but only for parades and suchlike events. However, Stefanie Hoss (2010; 2017) points out that this runs contrary to written sources which mention the use of belts with silver fittings in war zones (adding that, from the perspective of Roman writers with upper class backgrounds, centurions were commoners, brought up on the social ladder only by virtue of their military service – see Niemeyer 2011, 6).

What Roman infantry belts looked like is quite well known thanks to numerous grave presentations depicting the deceased in their military gear (Coulston 2004, 141; Hoss 2014, 283). For cavalry belts we do not have as many iconographic sources: not only are *stellae* (which can be unequivocally assigned to mounted warriors) fewer, but also the images are less useful for reconstructions due to being more propaganda oriented, i.e., with many of the reliefs being less detailed (Coulston 2004; Hoss 2010; 2014). Nevertheless the popular view is that Early Empire cavalry did not wear the lavishly decorated *cingulum militare*, with horsemen belts being simple and bereft of metal fittings until the end of the 2nd century (Coulston 2004; Hoss 2010; 2014). Third-century imagery shows cavalrymen wearing the same belts as infantrymen or soldiers from *auxilia*, as shown on other contemporary reliefs. A similar conclusion stems from analysis of finds from 2nd- and 3rd-century infantry and cavalry camps. Only D-shaped buckles with triangular cross-section frames are linked with mounted soldiers (Hoss 2010, 290).

Metal elements of Roman belts are a relatively rare category of imports found in the Central and Northern European *Barbaricum*. In the Late Roman Period, in phases C₁–C₂, such finds are con-

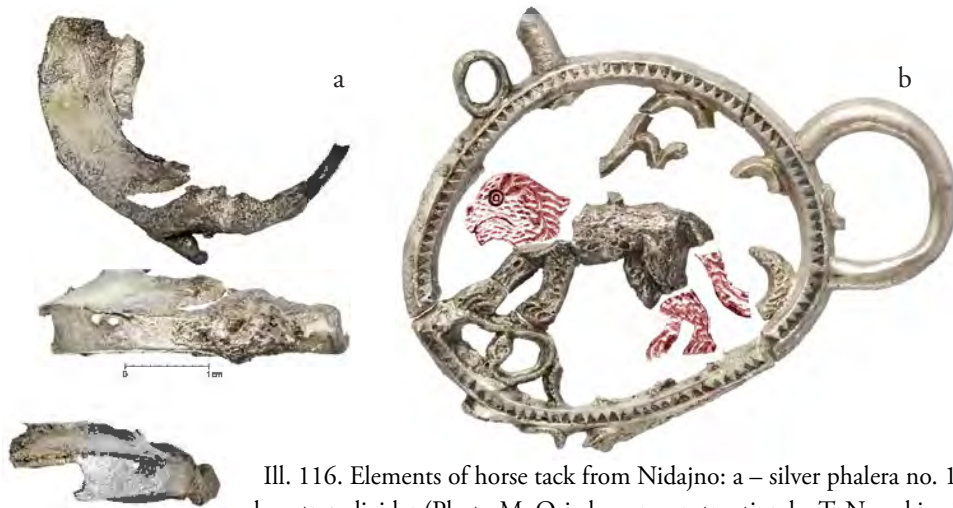
3 Regarding 1st-century weapons, a large majority of belts and horse harnesses were manufactured at Roman military *fabricae*, yet production linked with the army's infrastructure was small. Particularly in smaller garrisons of the *auxilia*, local manufacture was supplemented by imports from the Mediterranean area and from urban artisanal centres in the *limes* zone. Archaeological sources from the 2nd and 3rd centuries point to military equipment being made at artisanal-trade settlements functioning next to military camps yet outside their fortifications (*vici* and *canabae*), where privately owned workshops also operated (Bishop 1985, 13, 17; Oldenstein 1985, 83, 89; Bishop, Coulston 2006; Nicolay 2007, 133–135). This system functioned smoothly up to the time of the Frankish invasions, finally collapsing c. 270 AD. Under Diocletian (284–305) the system of manufacturing based around centralized and state-controlled production centres was reinforced, though it continued to be complemented (especially along the *limes*) by local workshops (Nicolay 2007, 137).

4 Only soldiers and veterans had the right to wear military belts (Hoss 2014; 2017).

centrated in what today constitutes central Germany. Interestingly, the numerous military clashes between Barbarian raiders and the defenders of Roman provinces did not result in any noticeable increase in the number of finds of Roman military belts in Barbarian burials from phases C_{1b} and C₂ (Bemmann 2003; Madyda-Legutko 1992; 2016, 611, 616–622, ill. 8).

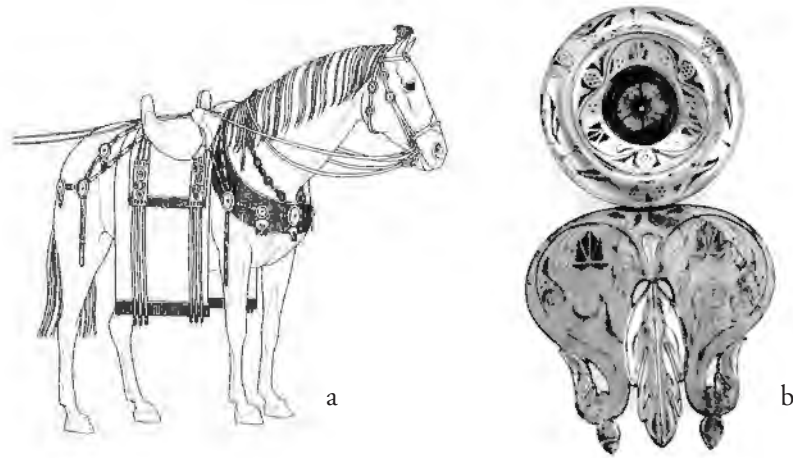
Belts aside, finds from the *Barbaricum* dated to the Late Roman period point to male dress being relatively devoid of accessories. This phenomenon leads to some problems with the synchronization of dating systems (on the one hand, based upon female burials lavishly equipped with metal elements of dress, and male burials equipped chiefly with weapons on the other). Late Roman Scandinavian bog deposits with weapons and male burials with more lavish assemblages allow us to surmise that richly decorated arms and armour were a form of expressing a warrior's prestige. Their rich ornamentation confirms the prestige conferred by martial prowess in those societies. Belts, the most showy element of male dress, were subject to treatment aimed at making them as impressive as possible, at times by employing highly refined decorative techniques (Madyda-Legutko 1986; Przybyła 2018, 425, 501). When their reconstruction is possible, the preserved remains point to belts being used to attach a sword's scabbard. Most such finds are from Northern Europe, yet single finds of belts decorated with embossed sheet also are found in lavish burials from the Central European *Barbaricum* (Ilkjær 1993; Carnap-Bornheim, Ilkjær 1996a; 1996b; 1996c; Przybyła 2018, 425, 501).

Two Nidajno artefacts: the incomplete and reconstructed from seven fragments of a silver-gilded and *niello*-decorated openwork strap divider with the motif of a lion and vines (no. 10) and the fragment of a silver box phalera (no. 15) were identified as belonging to a horse's harness (Ill. 116). Their connection with the set of silver fittings is suggested by the stylistic features of the strap divider (see Chapter 6) and the choice of metal for the phalera.



Ill. 116. Elements of horse tack from Nidajno: a – silver phalera no. 15; b – strap divider (Photo M. Osiadacz; reconstruction by T. Nowakiewicz)

In the Roman Period horse tack with bronze fittings was in widespread use: elements of such tack are found at all Roman military centres, especially those along the *limes*. Finds of decorated elements of parade harness are much more rare. Besides plain elements of military horse tack, tin, and *niello*-decorated bronze elements, we also know from the Claudian-Flavian Period pendants with elaborate decorative forms and decorative phalerae. These are identified as *dona militaria*, i.e., military decorations (especially those decorated with medallions with busts of the goddess Victoria or members of the Imperial Family; Bishop 1988; Deschler-Erb 2000; Nicolay 2007, 43–44, 148). These may have been attached to straps of the head harness, saddle straps, or to breastplate straps and are regarded as a part of parade tack, not used for combat (Ill. 117: a; Bishop 1988, 108–109; Nicolay 2007, 48).



Ill. 117. a – reconstruction of a horse parade harness from the Flavian Period (Bishop 1988, ill. 31); b – phalera with trileaf pendant from the Lower Rhine, from Doorwerth, Gelderland, Netherlands (Nicolay 2007, ill. 4.14)

The term phalera is also used for a variant of circular “working” elements, i.e., “connectors” of leather straps, and divided into several types. Phalerae from the Claudian-Neronian Period have a convex-concave surface, three or four bars on the reverse and, in some cases, eyelets to attach straps (type B acc. Nicolay [2007, 49]). Their surface was tin-coated, with more showy examples additionally decorated with vines and vine-leaf *niello* inserts (Ill. 117: b). A new type of such connectors appeared in the 2nd century, the use of which was carried over into the next hundred years. These were openwork shields with square or round eyelets; in examples without eyelets the leather straps were drawn through the circular frame of the shield (type C acc. Nicolay [2007, 50]). Specimens with four rectangular holes on the rim, between the outer and inner facings of the phalera are similarly dated (type D). These types fell out of use at the end of the 3rd century.

Type C and D phalerae are rare finds and mostly come from provinces along the Rhine-Danube *limes*, with part of the artefacts from the Rhine delta being discovered in a water context (Nicolay 2007, 50–51). Silver-coated or gilded examples are very rare (Lau 2014a, 179), with bronze, undecorated box phalerae with rectangular holes on the rim – the type the Nidajno example is formally associated with – being equally uncommon. Most had been discovered along the Danubian *limes* and in Morocco and are dated to 2nd-3rd centuries (Lau 2014a, 168–169). The silver, gilded specimen from Nidajno is evidently closer to the Sarmatian phalerae from the 2nd half of the 3rd century, also made from precious metals (see Chapter 6). This fact does not imply a Sarmatian origin of the artefact, but is evidence of the luxurious standard of the Nidajno set, with the same applying to the openwork strap divider. Such dividers dated to the 3rd century have been found along the Rhine-Danube *limes*, with the highest concentration of finds from the middle Danube, in the neighbourhood of Pannonian military camps, and often in burials (Lau 2014a, 172–173). Thus the features of both artefacts confirm their uniqueness and exceptionality – both due to their materials and exquisite craftsmanship – and are a nice fit with the martial character of the rest of the parade assemblage from Nidajno.

The ornamental value of the fittings, their stylistic ties, and potential link with horse riding suggests that the set from Nidajno may have been a rider's panoply, more specifically – that of a high ranking member of cavalry, likely an *ala* of the *auxilia*. Nonetheless, this theory cannot be verified at the present state of research.

Individual *auxilia* units differed not only in the type or origins of their members, but also in size, battle honours, and wages. The hierarchy was topped by horse alae, followed by riders from *cohortes equitatae*, with infantry ranked at the bottom. A cohort was usually commanded by a single prefect or tribune, with alae subdivided into *turmae* headed by decurions. During the Empire the officer class of the *auxilia* came to be dominated by men from the *equite* class. They were often promoted, eventually assuming the command of increasingly large formations, with infantry being evidently of lower standing than cavalry (Speidel 1994, 387–388).

The importance of mounted formations constantly increased, this being driven by the changing political circumstances of the Empire – mostly by various internal crises and the growing pressure of Barbarians on its borders. Although the army's main strength (practically up to the very end of the Western Empire) lay in its foot troops, “the legion-augmenting *auxilia* provided a significant number of good, disciplined riders – something that often was lacking under the Republic – as well as archers wielding advanced composite bows”, as noted by Adrian Goldsworthy (Goldsworthy 2018, 362). The soldiers of mounted formations, initially recruited among non-citizens and in provinces with strong cavalry traditions, and then among peoples from outside the Empire, were Roman army regulars – paid for and trained by the State and employed for *ad hoc* tactical ends as well as strategic deployments. An example illustrating the latter is the presence of a contingent of Sarmatian cavalry in Britain.

The main source of information on this matter is Cassius Dion (LXXI.6), who, in the context of the peace treaty ending the Marcomannic Wars, mentions the dispatch of a large body of Sarmatian Iazyges, some 5,500 strong, to that insular province. Locations of their quartering point to their use for protection of the northern border, a task for which these experienced warriors were particularly well-suited. Their presence is corroborated by e.g., six inscriptions (half of them from *Bremetennacum* / Ribchester), some of which explicitly state their ethnicity (e.g., *numerus equitum Sarmatarum Bremetennacensium*). These Sarmatians served in the *auxilia*, divided into *alae* numbering – as suggested by data from Ribchester – some 500 riders each. Thus there were probably eleven or so such units located across the unruly, northern borderlands⁵ (Istvánovits, Kulcsár 2017, 412–413). In this context one should note that their effectiveness stemmed from operating in small units, the formations of 500 troops being large enough to allow splitting them into smaller sub-units, each with their own line of command. Hence the importance of officers in the effective execution of field missions and garrison duties.

Light is shed on the duties, skills, and uses of mounted formations by historical sources. Goldsworthy quotes Flavius Arrian (c. 86–160 or c. 95–175), born in Nicomedia in Bithynia, a writer, historian, and Roman senator who, under Hadrian, served as *legatus* in Cappadocia (in 131–137). His military administration duties involved i.a., visitations of garrisons on the eastern coast of the Black Sea. Besides comments on purely administrative and logistical aspects (payment of wages, inspections of equipment, visitations of lazarets), his reports mention regular training carried out by the soldiers. Although quite laconic, these accounts contain descriptions of cavalry exercises: throwing javelins and leaping onto horseback – the latter skill, as pointed out by Goldsworthy (2018, 368–369), was of course “important in the pre-stirrup era”.

Military training and the quality of mounted formations were commented upon by personages from the very top of the Imperial Government. One example is the long inscription from the camp of the *legio III Augusta* from *Lambaesis* in Numidia, perpetuating the highly laudatory words of Emperor Hadrian expressed after his visitation regarding both the officers and rank and file of the legion. The text mentions an *ala I Pannoniorum*, doubtless a form of expressing appreciation of the unit, as well as another cavalry *ala* admonished for excessive boldness in attack and pursuit – heedless, even if enthusiastic. Finally the satisfied Emperor was quoted: “Had something been amiss, I would have noticed; if something had stood out, I would have mentioned it. Your entire manoeuvrers were a pleasure to watch” (Goldsworthy 2018, 370).

So far as training at garrisons and manoeuvrers were planned and followed a prepared script, combat missions usually had an *ad hoc* character. The effectiveness of the mostly *auxilia* cavalry

5 Hence this was a much more substantial force than the 16th-century *Obrona Potoczna* and its successor formations screening the south-eastern reaches of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth against Tatar slavers. Using the length of the Hadrian Wall as reference – 117 km, we have each of the Sarmatian *alae* (even assuming that not all were assigned to the northern border) being responsible for sections of just over a dozen kilometres – doubtlessly providing adequate security.

formations during the Principate is corroborated by the course of many battles – from the clash at Mons Graupius (84 AD), through the Battle of Lugdunum (197 AD) which gave power to Septimius Sever, to Galien's victory at Milan (258 AD) in large part due to the large mounted formations included in his host, up to the campaign preceding Constantine's triumph at the Mulvian Bridge (312 AD). Of particular import in the increased role of cavalry in the army were the military reforms instigated by the aforementioned Galien. He increased the size of the cavalry arm with a developed structure, one capable of swift action against Barbarians and usurpers, both being plentiful during his reign. One may assume that from the middle of the 3rd century cavalry commanders enjoyed growing influence, power, and prestige – both inside the military and among the general public suffering from the unstable times. Hence it cannot be ruled out that the expensive, showy, leadership status highlighting elements of dress were made for one of such men, only to exit circulation by sacrifice in the waters of Nidajno in the distant, north-European *Barbaricum*.

8. Dating the elements of parade equipment from Nidajno

Precise dating of the analyzed fittings from Nidajno is hindered by the particulars of the bog deposit they are a part of, for what we have here is a dispersed assemblage, one lacking concentrations of artefacts and exhibiting no anthropogenic stratification. Moreover, there were probably several phases in the use of the sacrificial bog. A precise dating of the finds from Ukraine is simply impossible due to there being no data as to the context of their discovery. These finds may be dated indirectly, however, through comparisons with the two already mentioned silver fittings with zoomorphic motifs from the lavish burial at Wrocław-Zakrzów (burial III). Much the same goes for the fittings from Pielgrzymowo (barrow HG1) that are devoid of such ornamentation. Nevertheless one should bear in mind that the dating of these assemblages must be approached with caution due to their specific nature (the artefacts were discovered a long time ago, some of the artefacts have been lost, with all information on them now coming from archived sources). Still, these are the best comparative materials we have.

8.1. Decorated buckles

The main dating elements for the parade assemblage from Nidajno are buckles (Ill. 118): two damaged, in various manners, specimens made from silver and that are gilded (nos. 1 and 2) and a third, also made from silver, with a high probability of belonging to this assemblage (no. 16).



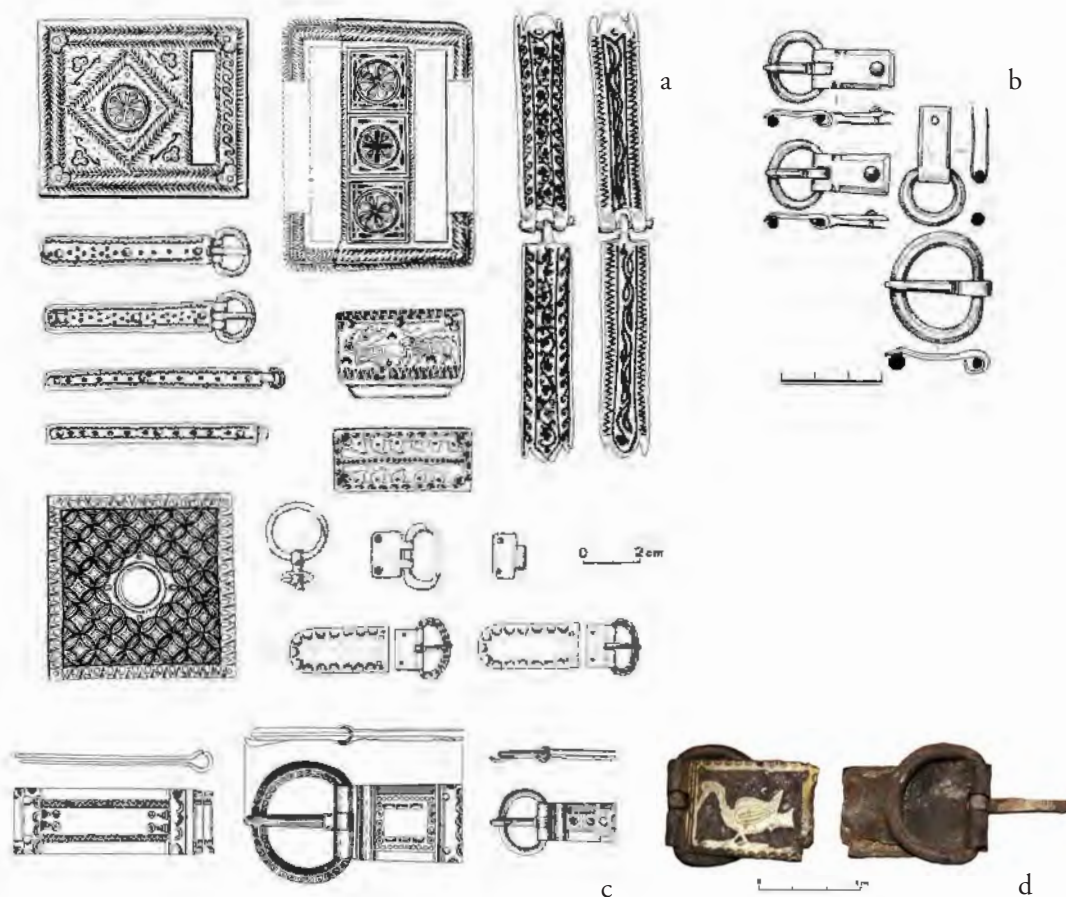
Ill. 118. Silver buckles from Nidajno: a – no.1; b – no. 2; c – buckle with an angular cross-section frame, no. 16 (Photo M. Osiadacz, M. Bogacki)

Two silver buckles (nos. 1 and 2) possess oval, faceted upper frames (flattened from below), decorated with a pair of finely made bird (geese?) heads. Their surface is gilded and covered with *niello*, with the sole preserved prong being decorated at its base with a sort of metope made from two perpendicular lines and semi-spherical stamps on the shorter sides. The shape of both examples is similar to type H3 according to Madyda-Legutko, as represented by buckles from the lavish burials at Leuna in Germany (burial 3/1926) and Wrocław-Zakrzów (burial III; Ill. 119: a), dated to phase C₂ of the later Roman Period¹ (Madyda-Legutko 1986, 60). Yet the Nidajno buckles differ in being faceted, with the trapezoid frame cross-section and – foremost – the presence of bird heads bringing them typologically close to specimens from group I, i.e., late Roman military belt buckles decorated with animal heads and dated to the 4th century (Madyda-Legutko 1986, 77; 2016, 616–618, ill. 8, 9). A characteristic feature common to all the finds from Nidajno – setting them apart from the discussed examples – is the round in cross-section, finely crafted fixed pin, cast together with the frame. This arrangement is often seen in artefacts assigned by Madyda-Legutko to group I². Hence the two buckles from Nidajno may be regarded as representing a transition from group H to group I, i.e., a rarely seen phenomena. The unique ornamentation and individual features suggest their allocation to an entirely distinct typological unit – namely, the “Nidajno type”. Its basic design features are the basis of dating this group to phase C₂.

A silver, two-part buckle with an oval faceted, angular frame with hexagonal cross-section (no. 16), close to type H4 acc. Madyda-Legutko, is equipped with a prong decorated at the base with five impressed dashes and a square ferrule, attached with two rivets. The shape, the frame’s cross-section, and the decoration of the prong are analogous to the silver set of horse harness fittings from the Sarmatian cemetery at Nežzac on the Crimean Peninsula (burial 169), crafted in the faceted style typical of late Sarmatian workshops in the middle of the 3rd century (Ill. 119: d; Khrapunov 2011, 68, ill. 4; 2012), with the Nidajno example differing in its lack of a profiling (faceting) of the prong.

1 The chronological system developed by Hans-Jürgen Eggers (1951; 1955) and Kazimierz Godłowski (1970; 1988) for Central Europe is as follows: phases C_{1a} (150/160–220/230), C_{1b} (220/230–260/270) and C₂ (260/270–300/310); the late Roman Period i.e., phase C₃ (300/310–360/370); onset of Migration Period, or phase D₁ (360/370–400/410). For a more detailed dating of the Migration Period, the periodization developed by Jaroslav Tejral is used (1988; 1997): phases D₂ (380/400–440/450), D₂/D₃ (430/440–470/480), D₃ (450–480/490), D₃/E (470–500/510; see Mączyńska 2019; 2020).

2 It should be noted that this technical solution was used in Roman military buckles of the *Leuna* type, dated to the 1st half of the 3rd century and discovered mostly in Roman camps along the *limes* in Rhetia, Noricum, and Pannonia. These are considered part of horse tack (see Madyda-Legutko 2016, 611–612, ill. 5).



Ill. 119. a – buckles from Wrocław-Zakrzów, burial III (Madyda-Legutko 1992, pl. IV); b – buckles from Nejzac, Ukraine, burial 169 (Khrapunov 2011, ill. 4: 6, 10, 11, 16); c – fitting and buckles from Pielgrzymowo, barrow HG1 (Lau 2012, , pl. 13: 4a, 5a, 15: 1a); d – fitting from Ukraine no. 1 (Артефакти України [Artifacts of Ukraine], <https://www.facebook.com/groups/1813007115390957>, accessed on: 9.12.2021)

The silver buckles from barrow HG1 at Pielgrzymowo (Ill. 119: b), equipped with rectangular ferrules and semi-spherical one-piece frames, are analogous as to the stamp types and design of punched pattern, and belong to type D10 acc. Madyda-Legutko. Elements of the belt from Wrocław-Zakrzów (burial I) are similarly decorated. Type D10 is associated with the Wrocław-Zakrzów–Hassleben–Leuna horizon of lavish burials, with all examples being dated to phase C₂ (Madyda-Legutko 1986, 27; Przybyła 2005; Lau 2012; 2014b, 212–214, ill. 9). The specimen from Ukraine also may be assigned to this type – it is decorated in the same style as the Nidajno assemblage, with a gilded depiction of a bird on a blackened background – but the context of its discovery is unknown (Ill. 119: c).

8.2. Other buckles

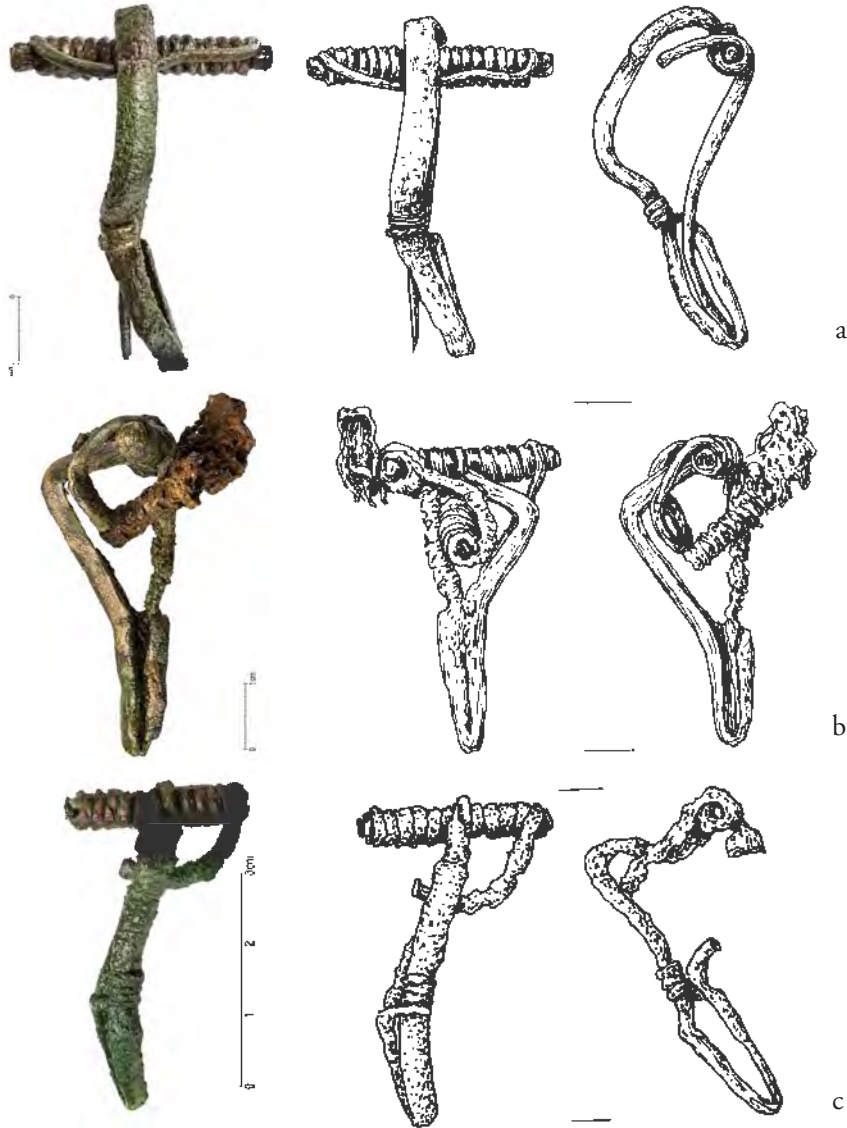
The remaining buckles from Nidajno – not numerous and but fragmentarily preserved – belong to popular types and were made from common materials such as iron or copper alloy. These are: an iron buckle with ferrule from group D (Ill. 120: a; Madyda-Legutko 1986, 22–32), the frame of an iron buckle type H30 (Ill. 120: b; Madyda-Legutko 1986, 68, 72, 74, pl. 20), a fragment of a bronze buckle with an oval frame, the frame of a bronze specimen probably type G52 (Ill. 120: c–d; Madyda-Legutko 1986, 57, 59–60, pl. 17) and one similar to type H13 (Ill. 120: e; Madyda-Legutko 1986, 64–65, 72, 75, pl. 19). The chronology of this category of artefacts is enclosed in the later Roman Period and does not extend beyond phase C₂ (Ill. 120).



Ill. 120. Iron and copper alloy buckles from Nidajno (Photo and drawing M. Osiadacz)

8.3. Fibulae

All crossbow fibulae with a tendril foot whose degree of preservation allows for typological identification belong to group VI acc. Almgren, and to forms 161 and 162 (Almgren 1923). The criteria of their assignment to type A VI 161 or A VI 162 is the shape of the bow.



Ill. 121. Nidajno crossbow fibulae from copper alloy: a – fibula A VI 162; b–c – fibulae A VI 161
(Photo M. Osiadacz; drawing B. Karch)

Fibula A VI 162 (Ill. 121: a) has a spring with over a dozen coils and, at some distance to it, a crossbow string. The arch of the bow is curved, with the highest point shifted towards the head of the fibula, which is relatively wide and massive. The foot is shorter than the bow, with three delicate coils placed directly atop it. The style of make is “rounded”, without facets and sharp angles. This fibula probably was made during phase C₁. The two completely preserved fibulae A VI 161 (Ill. 121: b–c) have a spring with over a dozen coils placed upon the axis. The crossbow string reaches the highest point of the triangular, arched, and facet-less bow. These features, especially the knee-formed and triangular (from the side) bows, are characteristic of phase C₂ (Jakubczyk 2013; there previous literature)³.

8.4. Spur

Among the finds from Nidajno we have an incomplete iron, silver-coated spur similar to Leuna type, variant B acc. Ulrike Giesler (1978, 11, ill. 2). Owing to the poor state of preservation it may be dated only broadly to the late Roman Period (Ill. 122; Kosiński, Rzeszotarska-Nowakiewicz, Nowakiewicz 2016, 178–180, ill. 11). It is unclear whether it was a Roman import or rather an accompanying local element (i.e., made at a Barbarian workshop), yet it nicely fits the elite context of the military assemblage.



Ill. 122. Fragment of spur from Nidajno (Photo M. Osiadacz)

The specific nature of a bog sacrificial site is not helpful in drawing up a precise chronology of the elements of parade equipment from Nidajno. To date no artefacts have been discovered in the explored section of the Nidajno site which could be dated with certainty to later than phase C₂ of the late Roman Period (2nd half of the 3rd century – early 4th century)⁴. This does not extend to

³ I express my appreciation for this insight to PhD Ireneusz Jakubczyk from the Archaeology Department at the University of Warsaw.

⁴ This is discounting the destructed part of an axe from the High Middle Ages found nearby. The tool is possibly testimony to an awareness of an ancient cult site lingering in the totally different environment of clearing the “Great Wilderness” (south-east Prussia) for settlement. Such expressions of respect for

weaponry whose analysis is particularly hindered by the poor state of preservation of the artefacts, usually lacking important diagnostic features, yet nevertheless with features which lend themselves to various interpretations⁵.

It is worthwhile to position the dating of the finds from Nidajno within the chronological context of their close analogies or stylistically more distantly related artefacts. For burial III from Wrocław-Zakrzów the *terminus post quem* is set by the *aureus* of Claudius Gothicus (268–270). The presence of silver, *niello* decorated fittings from a Roman officer's *cingula* in this assemblage is associated by Renata Madyda-Legutko with loot taken in Barbarian raids (Vandals, Markomanni, Quadi, and Sarmatians) into Pannonia during the reign of Aurelian (270–275; Madyda-Legutko 2016, 613–614). Hence it may be surmised that fittings with zoomorphic motifs from burial III found their way into the *Barbaricum* in that period or a time somewhat later, and in similar circumstances.

Silver, gilded officers' *cingula* decorated with *niello* from centres along the Danube are dated to the 2nd half of the 3rd – beginning of 4th century (Horedt 1958, 22–23, ill. 3.1; Diaconescu 1999, 220–222, 240, ill. 12.40; Mráv 2010; 2011; Hoss 2017, 95–96, ill. 17). The belt from Silistra (*Durostorum*) comes from a burial dated to the final quarter of the 3rd century (Diaconescu 1999, 220–222), while the belt from Alba Iulia (*Apulum*), belonging – together with other characteristic elements of an officer's dress – to a person with links to the local Dacian community, is dated to the period after Emperor Aurelian's decision to abandon Dacia c. 271 AD (Diaconescu 1999, 225; Madyda-Legutko 2016, 613).

The Eggers 121 type serving plates with palmetto grips and Hemmoor type buckets were produced chiefly in the 1st half of the 3rd century, with the younger horizon of their presence outside the areas of their manufacture (Gallia Belgica, Gallia Lugdunensis, Germania Superior) being set by Germanic deposits of war loot from invasions of Gaul and Rhetia between 233 and 275 AD, as well as by burial complexes in the *Barbaricum* (Ekholm 1961; Künzl, S. 1993; 2010, 175–178, diag. 1; Lund Hansen 1987, 71–73; 1995, 178–179; Erdrich 1995; Quast 2009a; 2016, 336–340, pl. 2; Becker 2010; Petrovszky, Bernhard 2016, 254–260, pl. 3; Luik 2016, ill. 2).

The large majority of silver and gold palmetto-shaped votive plaques also comes from the turn of the 2nd and 3rd centuries. Their mass production lasted from the end of the 2nd century up to onset of Barbarian invasions across the Rhenish and Danubian *limes* (Crerar 2006; Birkle 2013; Ciongradi 2013).

the *sacrum* of previous times was not beyond the norm of the Middle Ages and, considering the special reverence of Old Prussians towards “holy waters”, here it seems to be particularly likely (Nowakiewicz 2017; 2018). This theory is supported by sedimentological analysis pointing to occasional sharp drops in Lake Nidajno's water level, no doubt at times uncovering some of the more shallowly deposited Roman Period artefacts.

- 5 More recently, an analysis of some of the iron weapons by Bartosz Kontny has shown that some of them can be dated up to the 6th century AD. This proves that the Nidajno sacrificial site was in use for a longer period. There must have been several deposits over several centuries. Analysis of weaponry from Nidajno is the subject of a separate book by Tomasz Nowakiewicz, Aleksandra Rzeszotarska-Nowakiewicz, and Bartosz Kontny (work in progress).

Also relevant for the dating of the fittings from Nidajno is the chronology of the two artefacts with *gryllos* from lavish Barbarian burials: the shield-boss from Herpály and the saddle fitting from Osztrópataka-Ostrovany. For burial 2 at Osztrópataka-Ostrovany the *terminus post quem* is set by a coin of Herennia Etruscilla (248–251; Prohászka 2006; Quast 2009a); the Herpály shield-boss is variously dated by scholars to a period from the end of the 1st half of the 3rd century up to the final years of that century (Nagy 2007; Masek 2018).

Items from the Nidajno parade assemblage (including the gold sword fittings, silver bird figurine, sword pendant, and other status symbols) show chronological correlation with the equipment of so-called Princely East Group burials acc. Quast, i.e., the burials at Wrocław-Zakrzów, Osztrópataka-Ostrovany, and Pielgrzymowo (Quast 2009a). Compared to other lavish burials from the early 3rd century the opulence and variety of equipment of Eastern Group burials is exceptional and unique. Although here are no supra-regional criteria for distinguishing “princely” graves from the late Roman Period, the burials from Wrocław-Zakrzów and from Osztrópataka-Ostrovany with the so-called Emperor’s Brooch are among the most lavish 3rd century examples⁶ – in the Western Group only burial 8 from Hassleben and the burial from Gommern are their equals (Quast 2016, 335). Such correlation may point to some shared characteristics and circumstances leading to the parade assemblage from Nidajno and part of the finds from the aforementioned lavish burials appearing in the *Barbaricum*. Here I wish to say that in my opinion the time horizon during which the Nidajno fittings found their way into Barbarian areas should be narrowed down to the final three decades of the 3rd century and, possibly, the first two decades of the 4th century. This time corresponds to phase C2 and the beginning of phase C3, as formulated for the Wielbark culture (cf. Mączyńska 2019; 2020). This may have been connected with the Barbarian attacks on the *limes* during the reign of Aurelian in 270–275, and the events in *Barbaricum* as a result of these events (see Madyda-Legutko 2016, 613–614). At present the path along which they travelled to Nidajno is difficult to reconstruct.

6 The barrow at Pielgrzymowo had been looted in antiquity, but elements of equipment, especially the gold bracelet with cob-like finials, silver fittings, imported glass, ceramic vessels, and a wooden gaming board, associate this burial with the lavish graves of the Hassleben–Leuna–Zakrzów horizon (Lau 2012; 2014b).

9. The Nidajno Style as a cultural and artistic phenomena: definition of style

The unique combination of decorations used on the parade assemblage from Nidajno and its internal consistency evince a plainly distinct stylistic phenomena. Artefacts of analogous or similar iconographic content from other Central European sites point to these fittings being material evidence of a broader-scale tradition, one deserving a name of its own. As the best researched and most representative finds with such features have been discovered at the sacrificial site at Nidajno, I therefore suggest the term Nidajno Style. In spite of the narrow, at present, base of sources, its characteristic features may be identified and defined as follows:

1. Its decorative designs combine realistic zoomorphic depictions of animals with geometrically arranged stamps. Zoomorphic motifs appear principally independently, and are placed in the centre of the decorated item's presentations, though they also are present in the elaborate decorations along the edges (bird heads forming the crown of the palmetto or decorating the buckle frames).
2. Its friezes, made from rows of single or repeated semi-spherical stamps, form bordiures along the items' edges, framing the field with a leitmotif or centrepiece with either a single zoomorphic depiction, or a built-up zoomorphic presentation with geometric patterns. The most characteristic bordiure is that of a relief frieze from rows of deep semi-spherical stamps, with an arch facing inward ("postal stamp pattern"). More elaborate versions add double or triple semi-spherical stamps with their arches facing outward. The external bordiure is often accentuated with a parallel internal bordiure made with smaller, spherical or semi-spherical stamps and placed in a gilded band. In more sophisticated designs – e.g., palmetto fittings – rows of single stamps are used to frame individual elements of the composition.
3. The anatomic details of the zoomorphic presentations (snouts, teeth, scales, and fins, as well as fur and hair, etc.) are additionally highlighted in Nidajno Style, via stamping and engraving; eyes, ears, nostrils are marked with several, repeatedly used, types of stamps.
4. A particularly salient feature of this style is the contrasting of gold, silver, and black (*niello*) surfaces, arranged alternatively and alongside for multichromatic effect. The figural motifs are presented upon a contrasting background, e.g., gold on black, black on gold.
5. Such more or less elaborate arrangements of the elements described lend an air of restrained elegance to the Nidajno Style, even if the bordiure accompanying the well emphasized leitmotif occasionally drift into baroque excess.

6. Items in the Nidajno Style display technological uniformity: they are cast in silver, gilded, and decorated with *niello*. This is proven by laboratory analysis of fittings from Nidajno, cast from homogenous silver, gilded by fire-coating, etched or engraved and “hot” stamped. On larger surfaces *niello* was applied as a semi-liquid paste; smaller elements (triangular inlay of *niello* along the edges) were cut out from the congealed paste and placed in pre-prepared nests.
7. The Nidajno Style is closely intertwined with the military context. It most probably emerged in circles linked with provincial Roman military centres along the Danubian *limes*, probably those located on the middle or lower course of the river. The preserved examples point to it being used chiefly to decorate military belts and elements of horse harnesses, as well as elements of parade or ceremonial military equipment.
8. The so-far identified repertoire of figurative motifs of this style – lions, dolphins, gryphons, hippocampus, birds, fish, deer, palmetto, *aedicula*, *gryllos* – as seen on items from Nidajno, Wrocław-Zakrzów (burial III), and Ukraine, is genetically consistent and closely linked with Roman iconographic tradition, particularly apparent in decorations of military equipment.
9. The use of a *gryllos* motif on elements of military belts or horse harnesses, i.e., a placement unknown from classical Roman wares (where the *gryllos* is principally featured on gemmae), and inside an aedicula to boot (in the Roman milieu an element with sacral connotations), suggests that this development aimed at conferring a new meaning to the figure of *gryllos* – at least in the eyes of the owner of the belt or harness. This strongly supports the idea of the parade panoply from Nidajno having been commissioned by an officer – or veteran – of the Roman army. This person, almost certainly a Barbarian – probably a Germanic tribesman – had a personal reading of Roman traditions. This theory is reinforced by comparison of the *gryllos* from Nidajno with those from the shield-boss from Herpály and saddle from Osztrópataka-Ostrovany, similar examples of the adoption of this motif into Germanic art.
10. The *gryllos* motif in the context of the military styling of 3rd-century Barbarian wares appears only on a few artefacts, ones discovered to the north of the middle Danube (Herpály, Osztrópataka-Ostrovany) and in Ukraine (a pair of fibulae from near Zhytomir and an applique, whose discovery location is unknown). This supports the theory that the original workshop that crafted elements of equipment decorated in the Nidajno Style was located near one the Roman camps along the middle Danube – I identify this area as being the location of the emergence of this style. This hypothesis is further backed by the motif on the fitting from Wrocław-Zakrzów (burial III) depicting an eagle and deer and associated with Roman military cults with Oriental roots (*vide* the cult of Jupiter Dolichenus), in the 3rd century, ones widespread along the Danubian *limes* and in the Balkans.

In conclusion, I consider the coming together of all the described features in the findings from

Nidajno and Wrocław-Zakrzów (burial III) – as well as those described in Chapter 4 – to be unique combination that justifies the concept of Nidajno Style. The suggested dating of artefacts representative of Nidajno Style would stretch from the second half of the 3rd century AD (probably its last third) into the first decades of the 4th century. In the relative chronology of the Central European *Barbaricum*, this period is correlated with phase C₂ of the Roman Period.

10. The Nidajno Style: its genesis; the range and scale of its impact; and the scope of cultural interaction in the *Barbaricum*

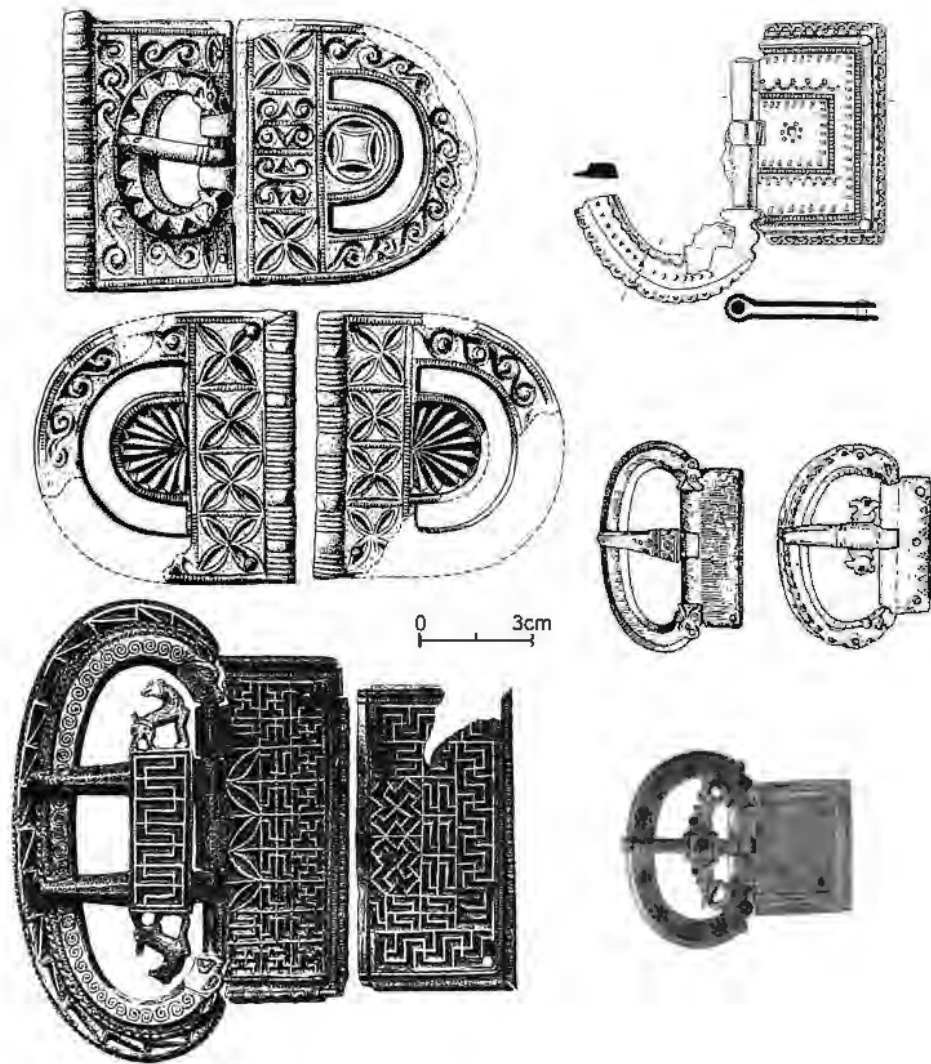
10.1. Continuation in Roman provincial art?

The characteristic elements of the Nidajno Style find their continuation and further development (also due to progress in gold-working techniques) in the ornamentation of a distinct category of 4th – and 5th-century personal military equipment, i.e., late Roman military belts with buckles decorated with animal heads (German – *Tierkopfschnallen*) – items characteristic both for the milieu connected to the Roman military, as well as the emerging Barbarian elite of the *limes* zone, often working alongside the Romans. The feature connecting these belts with the Nidajno Style fittings are the naturalistic zoomorphic presentations, the use of intricately composed stamped ornamentation and *niello*, and the decorating of frame buckles with animal heads. That last typological feature dates such items to the period between the final three decades of the 4th century and the middle of the 5th. A major difference between the two (one with significant chronological relevance) is cut out ornamentation (German – *Kerbschnitt*)¹, which is used to decorate some buckles and fittings: this form is not part of the Nidajno Style's repertoire (Ill. 123).

Buckles with animal heads from the sets of late Roman military belts are mono-bloc, formed in a manner which makes animal jaws grasp the bar. The separation of the axes from the frame and faceting of the oval frame was used on Nidajno type buckles, although the placement of animal heads (as well as their types) is different. Nidajno type buckles were decorated with bird heads on the external edge of the front of the frame, whereas on late Roman military buckles the animal (but never avian) heads are placed where the frame transitions into the bar. In late Roman belts we also see divergence from the realistic depictions of animals, something characteristic of the Nidajno Style. This was replaced with highly individualized and varied forms of presentation (buckles and fittings are decorated with various combinations of ornament – cut out, stamped, inlaid with *niello* or glass granules – in effect it is almost impossible to find two identical examples). These

1 The *Kerbschnitt* technique involved decorating the surface of items made from various materials (wood, metal, clay) with raised and sunken motifs. It was known in the Roman Empire, as evidenced by Roman provincial belt sets, yet expanded significantly during the Migration Period in the 5th century. The technique was principally used on metal items, with the pattern first cast and then etched and carved, often combined with *niello*. The prevailing motifs were geometric, such as spirals, multicentric circles, rhomboids, and zig-zags, these all being commonly accompanied by other ornamentation, like stylized animal heads or other zoomorphic elements. This manner of decorating items was unquestionably known not only to Germanic artisans, but also to the inhabitants of Nidajno in today's Mazury area of Poland, who used it to decorate bow fibulae in particular (see Böhme 1974a; 2000b; Hilberg 2009; Bitner-Wróblewska 2010; Bitner-Wróblewska, Pesch, Przybyła 2020, 274–275).

features are the basis of assigning late Roman sets of military belts to the so-called military style, a label occasionally used to define the associations between various elements of dress and equipment typical for this period (Böhme 1974a; 2000a; 2000b; Sommer 1984; Rau 2010a, 279–285).



Ill. 123. Buckles with animal heads from cemeteries: a – Sahlenburg, Lkr. Cuxhaven, burial 32; b – Herbergen, Lkr. Cloppenburg; c – Loxstedt, Lkr. Cuxhaven; d – Rohrsen, Lkr. Nienburg; e – Westerwanna, Lkr. Cuxhaven, burial 473 (all in Germany; Madyda-Legutko 2016, ill. 8: 1, 3–6); f – buckle from bog deposit Nydam IV, Denmark (Rau 2008, ill. 5:2)

The prevalent view is that belts decorated in such manner began to be worn by *foederati* and mercenaries hired by Rome from the final third of the 4th century onward, ushering in the conglomerate of Barbarian and provincial Roman elements characteristic of the Roman army in Late Antiquity. Most such finds come from along the Rhenish and Danubian *limes* and from the interiors of border provinces (Madyda-Legutko 2016, 616). Their highest concentrations were recorded in Galia Lugdunensis, Galia Belgica, and Germania, mostly in burials of soldiers who were probably of Germanic origin² (Böhme 2000b). Outside the Empire such items were discovered chiefly between the Rhine and Elbe, in Schleswig-Holstein, and in western Mecklenburg (Rau 2008; 2010a, 282; 2012)³.

Examples of buckles with a zoomorphic crossbar on the prong and ferrule with realistic figural presentations (type Misery; Ill. 124: c–f) as well as similar, yet devoid of *Kerbschnitt* and zoomorphic patterns on the ferrules (type Cuijk-Tongerem; Ill. 124: a–b), are known mostly from northern Gaul (from between the Seine and the middle and lower Rhine). These had probably been manufactured in workshops located on both banks of the Rhine⁴ (Böhme 1974a; 2000a, 68–69).

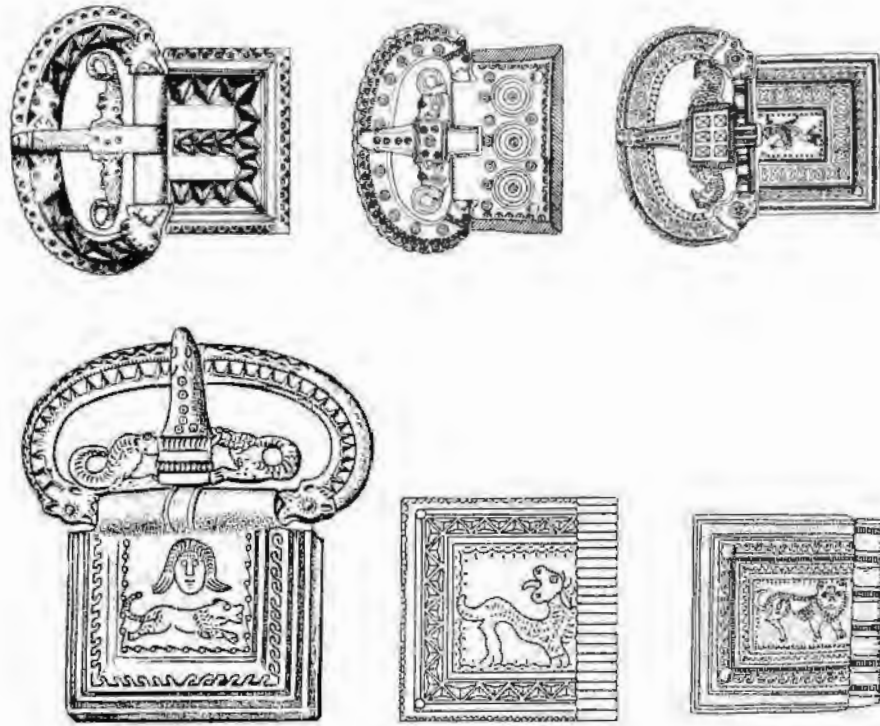
2 The enlistment of Barbarians into the Roman army began in the Late Republic, but in the reign of Valentinian I (364–375) the reorganization of the military led to the number of soldiers of Barbarian origin, Germanic in particular, being increased significantly (Böhme 2000a).

3 The classification of finds from northern Gaul raises certain interpretation problems. The current view is that these are the archaeological record of the presence of Germanic tribal federations, whose settlement in Imperial territory had been regulated by a treaty of alliance or of military assistance, allowing the tribe members to acquire Roman citizenship yet in large part remain under self-rule (Böhme 1974b; 2000a). Some of the belts from the north-western *Barbaricum* were associated with *foederati* returning to their homes once their term of enlistment ended. However, it does not seem very likely for genuine *foederati intra fines imperii* (*foederati* inside the limits of the Empire), who had lived with their entire families in villages and towns in provinces of northern Gaul, to return in the high numbers suggested by finds of elements of military belts in the western *Barbaricum* – and especially if the previous *foedus* (alliance) agreement included the conferring of Roman citizenship. However, the picture changes if to such *foederati* we add the so-called *voluntarii*, members of Germanic warbands (German – *Gefolgschaft*) from the right bank of the Rhine who voluntarily entered Roman service as auxiliary troops under the command of their own chieftains, and whose enlistment in the regular *auxilia* was probably shorter and dictated by circumstances, and in many cases terminated by the Emperor’s death. The high number of sets of belts manufactured in Roman provincial workshops and discovered in free Germania suggests that their owners returned to their homes with equipment issued to them during their service (see Böhme 1974b; 1999; 2000a; Rau 2008, 168–169; 2010a).

The presence of such belts and weapons in both northern Gaul and its *Barbaricum* neighbourhood may also be explained in a much simpler manner, one not involving legal arrangements or the hiring of Barbarians by the Roman military. Such items may simply be evidence of trade inside the *limes* zone, of the emergence of warbands centred around Germanic chieftains, whose members used elements of military equipment with status-conferring qualities recognized among the Barbarians. In such light these finds would not be testimony to the presence of Germanic warriors in the late Roman army, but as an expression of such warriors’ aspirations (Rau 2010a, 279).

4 As concerns the multicultural civilization of northern Gaul and the cultures of the north-west *Barbaricum* in the late 4th and early 5th centuries, the adjectives “Roman” and “Barbarian” denote in practice the workshops’ location – “to the west of the Rhine, in Roman territory”, or “on the left bank of the

Examples include the elements of belts from cemeteries at Vermand III, burials 321 and 397 (Ill. 124: d–e), and from Misery in France (Ill. 124: c, f), as well as fittings from Aquilea (Italy) and Szamos-Ujvar (Hungary, decorated with depictions of lions (Aufleger 1997, 163–164, pl. 95: 1, 4, 7; 96: 7; Rau 2010a, 284, ill. 113). A similar set of a belt with a Cuijk-Tongeren type buckle with a ferrule comes from the north Germanic sacrificial bog deposit at Nydam IV (Ill. 123: f). Elements of this type are dated to between the last third of the 4th century to the middle of the 5th century (Rau 2010a, 279, 288–289).



Ill. 124. Buckles and fittings decorated with animal motifs: a – Krefeld-Gellep, Germany, burial 5589; b – Oberwesel, Germany; c – Misery, France; d – Vermand III, France, burial 321 (Rau 2010a, ill. 113); e – fitting from Vermand III, France, burial 397; f – fitting from Misery, France, from burial (Aufleger 1997, pl. 95: 1, 4, 7)

Rhine, in Barbarian areas”. Usually, due to individualized ornamental forms and the similar quality of the craftsmanship of belt buckles, these cannot be assigned to any specific workshop, nor can we identify their origin. Hence it is not known whether it was a provincial Roman artisan making such belts for Germanic elites on the “Germanic side” of the Rhine, or if it was some Germanic tribesman in the *vicus* of a Roman fort hammering them out for Roman soldiers of Germanic origin (Rau 2008, 167–168; 2012). The common view is that although initially such belts were manufactured in Gaul, the majority of examples with zoomorphic presentations were made in workshops along the Danube (Böhme 1974b, 295).

Examples of the highest artistic skill put into items made in the *military style* of this period are three fittings of a spear shaft (elements of a single set⁵) and a buckle, all from the looted chamber grave at Vermand (Ill. 125), the burial of a high-ranking *auxilia* officer, probably a Frankish aristocrat (Böhme 2000a, 88). The assemblage also included a bronze shield-boss with a facing from gilded silver (four rivets decorated with glass cabochons, the shield was covered with red-painted hide), silver fittings of a shield holder, remains of a quiver with arrows, and a *francisca*. The silver spear fittings and buckle were decorated with cut out ornaments (rows of spirals, scrolls, rosettes, a six sided star from braiding, and swastikas), gilded, and with *niello* inlays with details of zoomorphic presentations highlighted with punches. The buckle with semi-oval ferrule and crossbar with a pair of animal heads on the prong had a form typical of buckles with animal heads (mythical sea lions). The fittings had been made at a workshop possessing exceptional technological expertise, probably a *fabricae* in northern Gaul. Their elitist character is evidenced by the use of expensive materials and the very high craftsmanship. The burial is dated to the end of the 4th century – *terminus post quem* is marked by a Valentinian I coin (364–375; Böhme 2000a, 78–89).

Also categorized as late Roman military belts is an assemblage of impressive fittings made from silver, gilded, and decorated with *niello* (a fragment of buckle, *cingulum* fittings) hailing from the hoard from Coleraine (North Ireland), deposited in the 5th century⁶. The fragmentarily preserved fittings are dated to the end of the 4th or early 5th centuries (Ill. 126; Böhme 2000a, 78–89; Marzinik 2013; 2017, 55–57). The hoard's contents (chopped up parts of a belt, etc.) were interpreted by Sonja Marzinik as elements of a *donativa* which, in the late Roman army, served as a currency of sorts (in the form of chopped silver and/or ingots of silver)⁷. *Donativa* also were a form of a reward for soldiers from Britannia who, after discharge from their service with the *auxilia* in north Gaul, returned to their place of origin (Marzinik 2017). Of note is the form of the *cingulum* fitting – it was shaped like a shield or a stretched animal hide, analogous to fittings of Roman military belts and horse harnesses from the 2nd and 3rd centuries (see Chapter 5).

5 Luxurious fittings of spears are rare finds – from northern Gaul we know of about a dozen examples of spears with such decorations. The view is that such ostentatiously equipped spears were used in the late Roman period by Frankish aristocrats, mostly for ceremonial wild boar hunts (Böhme 2000a, 83–84).

6 Additionally the hoard included fragments of chopped silver items: vessels, spoons, fittings of a casket, plus over 1,500 coins dated to 407–408. It is theorized that the hoard was deposited after the official withdrawal of Rome from Britannia (Marzinik 2017, 57).

7 *Donativa* in the form of precious metals were handed out by the Emperor or late Roman high officials at special occasions. In the late Roman army these also became a sort of special emuneration (Guggisberg 2013; Marzinik 2013; 2017).



Ill. 125. Buckle and spear fittings from burial of *auxilia* commander in Galia, Vermand, France, c. 400 AD (© The Metropolitan Museum of Art; <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/465204>, accessed on: 23.05.2020)



Ill. 126. Fittings of an officer's belt from Coleraine, North Ireland, early 5th century (© The Trustees of the British Museum; https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/H_1855-0815-12, https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/H_1855-0815-14, accessed on: 06.06.2021)

In sum, many stylistic elements point to genetic links between Nidajno Style fittings and buckles with later, provincial Roman sets of military belts with buckles decorated with animal heads. The similar repertoire of zoomorphic presentations presumably indicates the continuity of the symbolic meaning of such depictions in the context of military ideology.

Items in the Nidajno Style were in use probably during the last three decades of the 3rd century and in the beginnings of the 4th, while the discussed sets of belts are dated from the last third of the 4th century onward. Explaining this hiatus – of at least half a century – is a research objective which should be included in future stylistic studies of late Roman elements of military dress.

10.2. Continuation in Barbarian (Germanic) art?

One of the features of Germanic art in the Roman and Migration Periods was the ease of adopting and combining diverse motifs and patterns borrowed from the classical, late Antiquity Roman *imaginarium*, and which were then subsequently transformed and developed. The earliest evidence of concepts being drawn from abroad for use in Germanic traditions – in new ways, reflecting technological capabilities – is dated to the 1st AD (Pesch 2012). At the close of the 2nd century we witness a growing tendency to use presentations of animals, an expression of the spreading acceptance of zoomorphic ornamentation among Germanic peoples, probably not without impact upon their emerging sense of identity. Without widespread literacy, the symbols used in depictions placed upon elements of parade military equipment were doubtless also a manner of building personal status and a visual code of communication among the Germanic elite (Pesch 2015; Pesch, Helmbrecht 2019, 432–434; Bitner-Wróblewska, Pesch, Przybyła 2020, 226).

Regardless of function (decoration, communication, status, etc.), Germanic art during the first four centuries after Christ was a conglomerate of provincial Roman and Barbarian motifs. The Nidajno Style shows us a new factor in Roman-Barbarian relations, a factor serving as a starting point for further studies on the emergence and development of other (both contemporary and later) decorative styles in those two universes. The zoomorphic ornamentation of the Nidajno Style places it among various artistic developments of the late 3rd century that may have served as inspiration for later Germanic animalist styles. Their final form stemmed from the gradual transformation of copied forms, ones increasingly stylized and enriched with new themes.

The similarity of motifs and stylistic elements does not imply a straightforward, linear evolution of these styles. Such processes at times could be highly complex and often were probably influenced by a many factors. The wealth of ornamentation styles and types of wares upon which such decorations were used is testimony to innovation and changes in local traditions (Bitner-Wróblewska, Pesch, Przybyła 2020, 226), with the presence of Roman and Barbarian themes additionally influenced by workshop locations and their artisans' cultural environment.

Even with the Nidajno Style showing the aforementioned mix of Roman and Barbarian traditions, it nevertheless is dominated by provincial Roman elements, with connotations linking it to the Roman military milieu and the cultural environment of *limes* zone workshops. It is characterized by an original and innovative combining of elements taken from Roman decorative art, transformed and compiled to the point of assuming a new quality – possibly pointing to a process involving someone hailing from a Barbarian milieu (and attached to its ideas), and having final say over the content of the presentations. One might assume that such individual initiatives may have affected the complex, inter-cultural processes shaping emerging Barbarian styles.

Similar processes brought us the *Römisch-Germanischer Mischhorizont* – a supra-regional, stylistic “mixed Roman-Germanic horizon”. It probably developed in parallel to the Nidajno Style, the most prominent common feature of both being the broad use of zoomorphic presentations. However, unlike the Nidajno Style, the *Römisch-Germanischer Mischhorizont* is dominated by the Barbarian component, this being visible not only in crafting techniques but also in the composition of motifs. Its iconic examples are silver artefacts recovered from a bog site at Thorsberg in Germany: a bent plaque with five zoomorphic presentations and two shields with embossed gold sheet from the mid 3rd century (Carnap-Bornheim 1997; Blankenfeldt 2008; 2015a; 2015b). A distinct feature is the combining of Roman techniques and motifs (e.g., distinctly stylized depictions of hippocampuses and capricorns) with elements of Barbarian styling, which allows us to discern that they were made by a Germanic goldsmith with skills acquired at a Roman workshop. This is one of the reasons for which these items are regarded as signs of the impact of Roman decorative styles upon the development of Germanic styles (Werner 1966; Carnap-Bornheim 1997; Carnap-Bornheim, forthcoming; Blankenfeldt 2008; 2015a; 2015b; Tóth 2016, 55–56).

Other artefacts made in a similar style are: the five silver chalices discovered on Zealand, specifically at Himlingøje, Nordrup, and Valløby; an embossed sheet with figural presentations; and the fittings of a drinking horn from Lilla Jored (Bohuslän, Sweden), as well as a fitting with depictions of does from the sacrificial bog site at Skedemosse on Oland (Lund Hansen 1995; 2006; Grane 2007a; 2007b; 2007c; Blankenfeldt 2015a). All these artefacts share the same technique of embossing or etching in precious metal, plus a decorative relief with presentations of animals or sequences of zoo- and anthropomorphic patterns. The repertoire of motifs evidently draws upon Roman art, which served as a source of inspiration for Germanic presentations (ones showing discernible echoes of the classical archetypes used and transformed by Germanic artisans)⁸. In contrast with the Roman originals, the depictions often are simply sketched with no details inside the contours. Also noticeable is the preference for certain types of creatures: besides the mythological hybrids these predominantly are representatives of local fauna (doe, deer, goat, horse, fish, birds, wild boar, squirrel)⁹, although – much more rarely – depictions of lions are also known (e.g., the facing of a shield-boss from Herpály, belt fittings from Neudorf-Bornstein, burials nos. 3 and 7).

Up to the middle of the 3rd century depictions of exotic animals, omnipresent in Roman art, very rarely appeared on Germanic wares. The general opinion is that the inspiration for early Germanic zoomorphic styling was that of patterns decorating Roman imports, such as the two

8 It is held that some elements, e.g., twin masks from silver sheet decorating the *phalerae* from Thorsberg, are provincial Roman and not Barbarian products. This remains an open question; if made in the *Barbaricum*, then these would be testimony to how well local artisans had mastered “Roman” gilding techniques (Werner 1966; Carnap-Bornheim 1997; Carnap-Bornheim, forthcoming; Blankenfeldt 2008; 2015a; 2015b; Tóth 2016, 55–56).

9 Nevertheless presentations of such animals, squirrels included, are also present in provincial Roman art (see Piccottini 2016).

luxury silver chalices from the burial at Hoby (Denmark) and the – more widespread – Hemmoor type buckets, *terra sigillata* ceramics, and glass chalices with circus scene type Eggers 209 (Lund Hansen 1987; 1995; 2000; Blankenfeldt 2015b, 48–49; Przybyła 2018, 567–578). The assumption is that Roman art influenced Germanic art on many levels, meaning that e.g., the luxury items from Thorsberg could just as well have been made by Germanic artisans trained at Roman workshops, or by Roman artisans in the employ of Germanic chieftains (Blankenfeldt 2015a; 2015b; see further literature there). As noted by Ulla Lund Hansen, telling apart a Barbarian and provincial Roman product from the *Römisch-Germanischer Mischhorizont* is very difficult, and at times simply impossible (Lund Hansen 1995; 2000; 2003; Blankenfeldt 2015a; 2015b, 48–49). Comparing artefacts representative of the *Römisch-Germanischer Mischhorizont* with products made by Germanic artisans of unquestionable Barbarian credentials (e.g., the parade shield from Illerup Ådal and silver chalices from Himlingøje) makes it possible to define the chronology of this phenomena in the northern *Barbaricum* to phases C1b–C2 of the Roman Period (Carnap-Bornheim 1997, Carnap-Bornheim, forthcoming; 87 and following, 94 and following; Lund Hansen 2003; Blankenfeldt 2015b, 48–49).

Research by Marzena Przybyła has shown that zoomorphic and anthropomorphic presentations and geometric patterns placed upon embossed plaques from the North and Central European *Barbaricum* in the late Roman Period also have manifold, inter-regional links. The first zoomorphic patterns appeared on such items in phase B2. These were bull heads and bucranium, interpreted as evidence of pre-Roman (Celtic) influence – in spite of such motifs also being known from Roman silver vessels (e.g., the bowl from Krakovany-Stráže, burial 2; Kolník 2012; Przybyła 2018, 574; see further literature there). In the stages of the Roman Period the repertoire of Roman zoomorphic motifs used to decorate such plaques broadened, now including doe, deer, goat, horses, fish, birds, wild boar, squirrels, as well as lions, hippocampuses, capricorns, sea serpents, and the Lesser Egyptian jerboa (*Jaculus jaculus*). Such depictions, with varying degree of realism, are adaptations of ornamentation used on Roman wares. In line with older authors, Przybyła mentions, among possible inspirations, provincial Roman products imported into the *Barbaricum* (Hemmoor type buckets, *terra sigillata* ceramics, and glass chalices of the Eggers 209 type), with some patterns being influenced by motifs from the Sarmatian milieu and Roman-controlled Greek cities of the North Pontic (swords with ring grip – from phase B2, sword pendants – from phase C1b, the earliest items decorated with inlay from semi-precious stones glass, motif of a bird holding a fish in its talons, depictions of riders – see the sheet facings from Krakovany-Stráže, burial 2; Przybyła 2018, 540–542, 574–578). As regards the motif of the rider, I believe one should also look at geographically closer depictions from the Dacian and Thracian areas in the Balkans

(see Chapter 5)¹⁰, making the anthropomorphic figural presentations on embossed sheet from the Carpathian Basin (Herpály, Osztrópataka-Ostrovany, Krakovany-Stráže) possess geographically closer ties. Likewise, the *gryllos* motif also seems to have strongest associations with the middle Danube area. Relations connecting the vast territories of the North and Central European *Barbaricum* with Roman provinces, Sarmatian culture, and the milieu of ex-Greek colonies in the East created a multi-tiered and complex system, making identification of origins, directions, and dynamics of stylistic influence difficult. Such inspirations probably spread along various routes and their unquestionable identification does not seem possible at the present state of research (for instance, the earliest elements of the polymorphic style, such as carnelian or glass inlays, may have reached this part of the *Barbaricum* from the North Pontic either directly – along the trade route linking the Black Sea with the Baltic area – or through Roman intermediaries; Przybyła 2018, 574–578).

The dating of *Römisch-Germanischer Mischhorizont* items partly overlaps, during phase C2, with the suggested dating of the Nidajno Style. The same applies to embossed plaques with zoo- and anthropomorphic motifs crafted in workshops of the North and Central European *Barbaricum*. Nevertheless, the distinct difference in style and (even more prominently) in crafting techniques between Nidajno Style fittings and products from *Römisch-Germanischer Mischhorizont* and from unquestionably Germanic workshops forms a basis for deeming these to be independent phenomena that had developed separately, even if in parallel, as it seems¹¹. The equipment of the lavish burials from Wrocław-Zakrzów (burials I and III) – where items of provincial Roman origin, Nidajno Style fittings, and Germanic wares decorated with embossed gold sheet offer evidence for such co-existence in the shared space occupied by Barbarian elites undergoing Romanization.

Recently, Claus Carnap von Bornheim has proposed a different perspective on the production process of the objects of the Germanic military elite, based on an analysis of selected finds from Illerup and Thorberg Bog (Carnap-Bornheim, forthcoming)¹². He stated that these phenomena could be “categorised more securely and conclusively, and integrated into a more general concept that moves away from terms such as adoption, adaptation or influence, and could offer further perspectives” linked to the concept of “active or conscious reception”. This means that although individual aspects such as technical skills, knowledge of materials and the availability of the necessary raw materials play a fundamental role in this reception process, “the decisive factor is proba-

10 In such context the motif of the eagle with a fish in its claws, characteristic of older Thracian culture, is of particular note (see Boteva 2020).

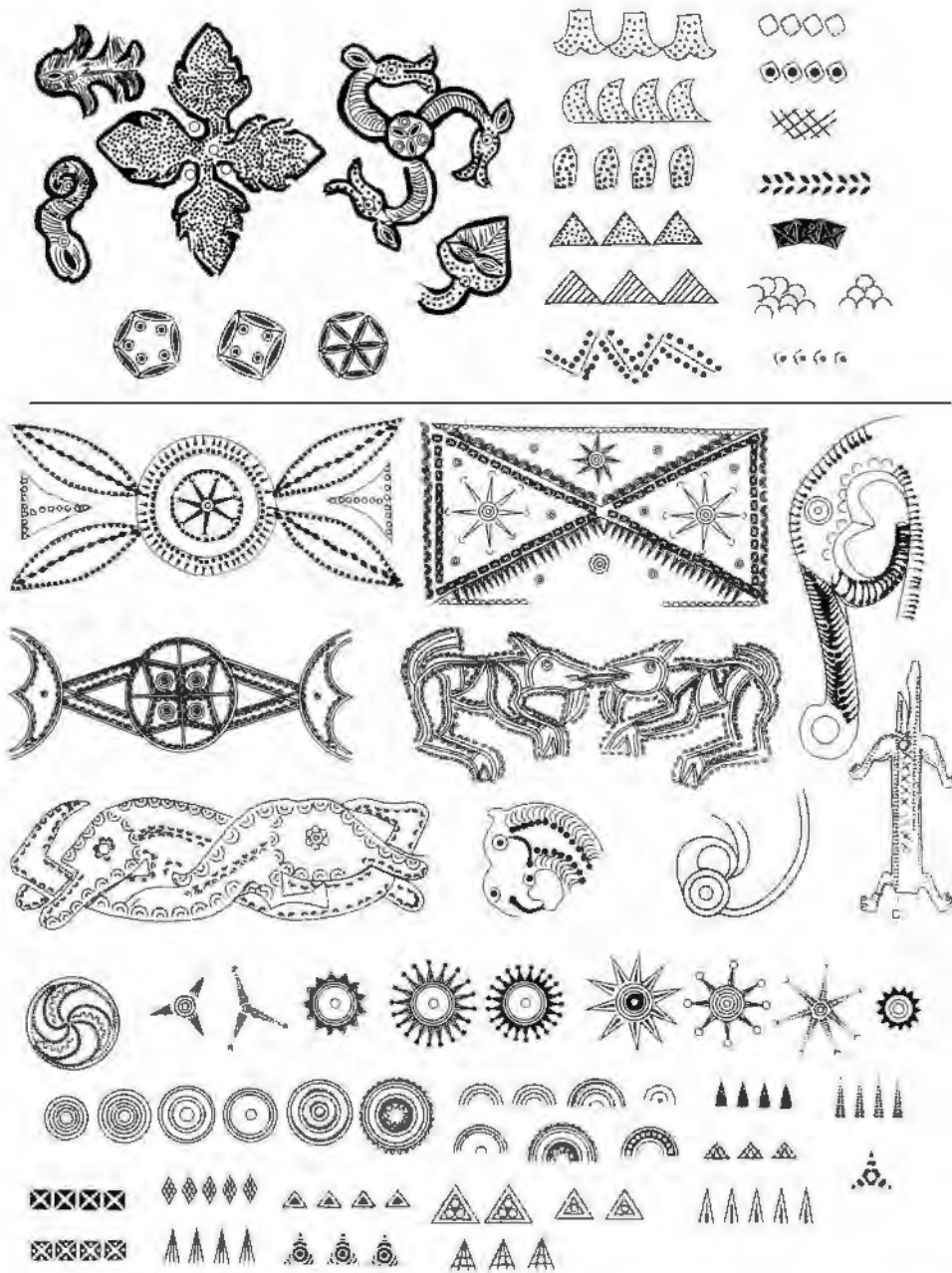
11 Here of particular relevance may be the strong connection between the Nidajno Style and the provincial Roman military milieu.

12 Many thanks to Prof. Claus Carnap from Bornheim for providing me with the contents of his article entitled “Nithijo in Illerup and his colleague in Thorsberg: Some aspects of high class goldsmithing at the beginning of the third century AD. A case study in “active or conscious reception”, which is now in print (Carnap-Bornheim, forthcoming”.

bly that both the client [...] and the craftsman [...] had a detailed common understanding of what was, in this case, a provincial Roman pictorial programme or provincial Roman script, appropriated it and knew how to implement it and artistically design it in a series of unusual objects and inscriptions” (Carnap-Bornheim, forthcoming).

Although the Nidajno Style appears to be a phenomenon limited in time to phase C2, its characteristic features (stamped ornament, *niello*, and the contrasting colours of surfaces, combined with zoomorphic decorations) still exist, are developed and transformed in various combinations in later decorative styles of the 4th and 5th centuries, at that time with a visibly inter-regional character. Elaborate stamped patterns, *niello* inlay, and partial gilding of silver or silver-coated surfaces are the salient diagnostic elements of the Sösdala-Untersiebenbrunn¹³ style. Patterns of punches form varied arrangements of circles, half-circles, triangles, rectangles, occasionally accompanied by incisions of the surface. The repeated, the most characteristic decorating motifs are the depictions of stars and rosettes (the former from triangular, the latter from lens shaped punches). Thus decorated items – e.g., pendants, fibulae, fittings of various types of artefact categories (belts, horse harness, sword and knife scabbards) – were discovered in areas with different cultural traditions: Scandinavia, Pomerania, lands of the Western Balts, in lands along the Danube, Rhine or Elbe rivers (the lower Elbe excepting) as well as in western and southern Ukraine (Ill. 127; Bitner-Wróblewska 2001; 2005; 2017; Bitner-Wróblewska, Pesch, Przybyła 2020, 228–230, ill. 6.1).

13 The term Sösdala Style was coined by John-Elof Forssander (1937) and based upon the large assemblage from Sösdala in Scania, consisting of some 280 silver, gilded silver, as well as bronze fittings of parade horse harnesses and saddles. Over time the definition of the Sösdala Style was refined or expanded by Olfert Voss (1955), Ulla Lund Hansen (1970), and Bente Magnus (1975), with the term “Sösdala Horizon” introduced into the academic lexicon by Anna Bitner-Wróblewska (2001). In the last few years several new publications concerning the Sösdala Style have been published, including a monograph on the eponymic Sösdala assemblage (Fabech, Näsman eds. 2017) and a chapter in the group publication on the Migration Period in the lands between the Oder and Vistula (Bitner-Wróblewska, Pesch, Przybyła 2020). The term “Sösdala Style” is just one of the names used for this complex phenomena, with other terms used in literature being: “Untersiebenbrunn”, “Untersiebenbrunn-Sösdala”, “Sösdala-Coşoveni”, “Sösdala Horizon”, “Sambia Horizon”, “Sösdala-Untersiebenbrunn-Velp” (Bitner-Wróblewska, Pesch, Przybyła 2020, 229; see further literature there). Regardless of the two-part eponymic name for the entire phenomena, the term “Sösdala” is used for Scandinavian artefacts, while “Untersiebenbrunn” for those from the upper and middle Elbe, Danube, western Ukraine and the Pontic.



Ill. 127. Motifs of the Sösdala-Untersiebenbrunn style characteristic of the Danubian and Pontic areas and of western Ukraine (a) as well as Scandinavia (b; Bitner-Wróblewska, Pesch, Przybyła 2020, ill. 6.1)

The Sösdala style, a part of the Sösdala-Untersiebenbrunn style, emerged near the end of the Roman Period, in phase C₃. In Scandinavia it is regarded as an indicator of the onset of the Migration Period, i.e., of phase D₁. In absolute chronological terms, it begins in the middle of the 4th century, and wanes in the 1st half of the 5th century. The most prominent markers (of the Scandinavian) phase D₁ are its later, more developed forms, such as bird heads shown in profile placed on the edges of pendants and shield brooches. In this period (phase D₁) stamped ornamentation was enriched with highly elaborate rosettes with the motif of lancet-shaped leaves as well as zoomorphic and anthropomorphic motifs. In the later stage of phase D₁ stamped ornamentation inspired by the Sösdala style co-exists with cut out and zoomorphic decoration of items in the Nydam style (see below). The latest examples of the Sösdala style – bow brooches from the burial complexes at Sejlflod (Aalborg, Denmark) and Rolighed (Vestfold, Norway) – are dated more to phase D₂, the chronological terminus of this phenomena (Bitner-Wróblewska 2017; Bitner-Wróblewska, Pesch, Przybyła 2020, 232–236, map 6.1). Other artefacts associated with this horizon are found all over south Scandinavia, with evident concentrations in northern Jutland, south and south-western Norway, on Zealand, and in south Sweden. The limits of its incidence are set by the finds from Schleswig, Bornholm, and Gotland (Larsen 1984, 169–180; Bitner-Wróblewska 2001; 2017; Bitner-Wróblewska, Pesch, Przybyła 2020; see further literature there).

In the later stage of Scandinavian phase D₁ (Central European phase D₂) elements characteristic of the Danubian and Pontic zone appeared on Scandinavian Sösdala style items, i.e., geometric patterns blackened with *niello*, deep and sharp edged triangular stamps, wavy ornament and ribbons made from braided oblique lines, as well as lens-shaped stamps (Bitner-Wróblewska, Pesch, Przybyła 2020, 234–235, map 6.2). These are known from e.g., fittings discovered at the sacrificial bog site at Nydam (Denmark), from hoard Nydam II – dated to the Migration Period – which included almost 100 silver artefacts (many of which were partly gilded and blackened with *niello*). Among them were the fittings of at least 11 difference sword scabbards (Jørgensen, Vang Petersen 2003, 273–274, ill. 40). A particularly diverse decoration was recorded on the assemblage of fittings from the wooden sword scabbard no. 8222 from horizon Id, consisting of a rectangular fitting of the throat, a pendant, and a chape (Ill. 128: a–b). It was decorated with an elaborate combination of many elements: stamped and cut-out patterns, partly gilded, *niello* plus zoo- and anthropomorphic presentations. Among the former one may see the well advanced stylization of depictions of the hippocampus¹⁴ in the upper part of the pendant and the arrange-

14 Among the finds at Nydam were wooden sword scabbards decorated with presentations of hippocampuses with tails ending in a tri-partite fin, motifs of tridents, and rows of spiral strands. The accepted view is that such decorated scabbards had been made in Roman provinces by provincial Roman artisans. In studies into the genesis of the Nydam Style it was theorized that it evolved from Later Roman sculpting style, as a result of the resettlement of artisans from Roman provinces into the *Barbaricum* (Bemmann, G., Bemmann, J. 1998, 235–236). Alternative interpretations see Barbarian (Germanic) artisans honing their skills and knowledge of ornamentation at Roman workshops, recreating typical, Late Antiquity motifs after returning to the *Barbaricum*. The Nydam Style is unquestionably the effect

ment of two pairs of serpent-like beasts with pelta-shaped elements on the chape. These fittings are an example of combining elements of Sösdala-Untersiebenbrunn style ornamentation, common to Scandinavia and the Danubian and Pontiac zones. The scabbard with fittings no. 8222 is dated by the silver buckle type ML H 42–45, similar to type Strzegocice–Tiszaladány–Kerch, to phase D2 (400/410–420/430; Rau 2010a, 337–340, ill. 140; see further literature there). Some buckles of this type are decorated in the Sösdala-Untersiebenbrunn style (Ill. 129), and are mostly known from the Carpathian Basin and southern Poland and – to a lesser degree – from the Pontic area (Madyda-Legutko 1978; Levada 2011; Kontny, Mączyńska 2015; Bitner-Wróblewska, Pesch, Przybyła 2020, 246–249, map 6.4).



Ill. 128. Artefacts decorated in the Sösdala-Untersiebenbrunn style: a–b sword scabbard fittings from Nydam, Denmark (Jørgensen, Vang Petersen 2003, ill. 23); c – fitting from Ejsbøl II, Denmark (Jørgensen, Storgaard, Gebauer Thomsen edit. 2003, 408, 418, ill. 5.4d, 6.4)

of mutual interaction between provincial Roman and Barbarian workshops in the turn of the 4th and 5th centuries. Of particular relevance for our considerations are the Nydam sword scabbards, testimony to the individual artisanal skill of their makers, and testimony to the appeal of repeated artistic motifs drawing upon the symbology of Late Antiquity (Rau 2008; 2010a).



Ill. 129. Buckles of type Strzegocice–Tiszaladány–Kerch, dated to 2nd half of the 4th century – early 5th century: a – Bar, Ukraine; b – Szabadbattyán, Fejér, Hungary; c – Yalta, Ukraine; d – Sagi, Russia; e – Airan/Moult, France; f – Bârlad-Valea Seacă, Romania (Levada 2011, ill. 5, 12–13)

What is noteworthy in the context of the Nidajno Style is the similarity between the five pairs of bird heads from the edge of the palmetto fitting from Nidajno and the motif of a pair of bird heads placed on the edges of Sösdala-Untersiebenbrunn style items (particularly on pelta-shaped pendants and bow brooches). Other items in this style also possess depictions of animal profiles on their edges. A good example here may be two pendants and a brooch from the assemblage of jewellery from the DI female burial at Sejlflod (Denmark), where pairs of zoomorphic depictions (wolves?) were placed on the plate of the brooches head and on both sides of the bow. That last motif, reduced and slightly modified (lack of nostrils and mandible, shifted eye), was repeated on both brooches (Ill. 130: d; Larsen 1984). Please note that such a change makes the heads more “birdlike” – similar to those on pendants from Sösdala or the example from the lavish burial at Jakuszowice, Kazimierz District (Ill. 130: a–c; see Rodzińska-Nowak 2016; 2020).



Ill. 130. Pendants with pairs of bird heads : a–b – Jakuszowice, Kazimierz District (Rodzińska-Nowak 2016, ill. 6); c – Sösdala, Sweden (Fabech, Näsman ed. 2017); d – pendants and brooch with depiction of a pair of wolves (?) from Sejlflod, Denmark (Larsen 1984, ill. 1); e – detail of Nidajno fitting (no. 8; photo M. Bogacki)

A motif similar to that of the palmetto fitting from Nidajno (repeated, bent bird heads facing one another) is dated to between the final third of the 3rd century and early 4th century (phase C₂). Its formal relationship with pelta-shaped pendants of the Sösdala-Untersiebenbrunn style – which are at least a few decades younger – testify to the early adaptation of this motif, known from even earlier Roman horse harness pendants dated to the Empire. Hitherto the view had been that the motif of animal heads in profile – this being integral to the Sösdala-Untersiebenbrunn style – grew out of a style popular in the Rhine provinces, thus pointing towards that region's links with Scandinavia in the early stages of the Migration Period (Quast 2017). The existence of such ties (mostly of military character, linked to Germanic warriors serving in the Roman army) is attested by the spread – starting with the final third of the 4th century – of belt buckles and fittings deco-

rated with animal heads (Rau 2008; 2010a; 2012; 2013). However, it should be mentioned that the motif of bird heads was not present. The palmetto fitting from Nidajno is thus a better iconographic parallel for Sösdala-Untersiebenbrunn style bird heads, in spite of being older by almost a century. This suggests that the Nidajno Style may have been one of the many threads which had somehow shaped the formation of the Sösdala-Untersiebenbrunn style.

Stamped ornamentation typical for the Sösdala-Untersiebenbrunn style and the use of elements in contrasting colours (gold, silver, black) also appears on items crafted in a style which emerged slightly later, i.e., at the close of the 4th century: the Nydam style. A new phenomena in ornament – and highly characteristic of Nydam style in particular – are deep cut-outs, often over an item's entire surface, and combined with zoomorphic decorations (Bitner-Wróblewska, Pesch, Przybyła 2020, 234; see further literature there). Owing to the parallel use of deep cut-outs, *niello* inlay, stamped ornamentation, and zonal gilding – these artefacts give off the impression of being more colourful than those crafted in previous styles. Scholarship emphasises the genetic links between this style and the styling of Late Roman military belts (also decorated with cut-outs and animal motifs); however, these were larger, more numerous, and more varied than examples associated with the Sösdala-Untersiebenbrunn style. Ornamentation of this style is dominated by depictions of aquatic hybrids, this being interpreted as a distant echo of Late Roman motifs. Anthropomorphic patterns with difficult to identify meaning also appear, such as quadrupeds with human heads and hands, these having no analogies in Antique Art.

The territorial extent of the Nydam style is smaller than that of the inter-regional Sösdala-Untersiebenbrunn style, being strictly concentrated in southern Scandinavia and northern Europe. This is why it is regarded as the first Germanic style, the forerunner of a separate artistic lineage, specific to the Germanic universe (Böhme 1974a; Bemmman, G., Bemmman, J. 1998; Rau 2008; 2010a; Pesch 2015; Bitner-Wróblewska, Pesch, Przybyła 2020, 275–278, 280–281). The Nydam style emerged at the end of the 4th century and then spread across southern Scandinavia and surrounding areas, becoming the dominant art style there for an entire century until eventually replaced by the Animal style I (Bitner-Wróblewska, Pesch, Przybyła 2020, 282–283; see further literature there).

Summarizing, available data points to the combination of lavish stamped decoration, the gilding of part of silver areas, use of *niello* plus sophisticated/elaborate zoomorphic patterns to have made its first appearance on elements of belts and horse harness in the Nidajno Style. In later day inter-regional, Germanic styles of decoration (Sösdala-Untersiebenbrunn and Nydam) one may notice the continuation and modification of specific Nidajno features, particularly evident in the parallel preservation of stamped ornamentation, but with the abandonment of realistic zoomorphic depictions. The difference in the manner of the preservation of animals (the quite reserved and subtle realism of the Nidajno Style *versus* increasing geometrization, stylization, and the growing *horror vacui* in Sösdala-Untersiebenbrunn and Nydam styles) might be yet another

hint at how deeply the chronologically older Nidajno Style was rooted in Roman Art, at its genetic links with provincial Roman art trumping connections with the Barbarian hinterland, and at its influence on the formation of Germanic styles.

10.3. The cultural and political context of how the Nidajno assemblage found its way to today's Mazury and travel routes in this part of the *Barbaricum* in Antiquity

From the moment of its discovery, the parade equipment at Nidajno opened the question as to its origins and the route to its resting place in today's north-eastern Poland. In the Roman Period Lake Nidajno lay in the vast expanses of the West Balt area. At that time those territories were subject to intensive settlement by Bogaczewo Culture people – a group with well-known and easy to identify cultural features (Nowakowski 1995; 2007; 2009; 2013; Bitner-Wróblewska 2007; ed. 2007; 2009; Szymański 2005; 2013; Juga-Szymańska 2014; Bitner-Wróblewska, Rzeszotarska-Nowakiewicz 2016a). It is beyond doubt that the assemblage of prestigious materials from Nidajno is entirely alien to this zone – in spite of being discovered alongside elements rather typical of the Bogaczewo Culture and neighbouring groups from this part of the *Barbaricum*. Hence it is indisputable and intriguing evidence of the long distance contacts of the local population – this being unrelated with whether these items arrived at Nidajno directly from their place of manufacture or by some other route¹⁵.

The above-described attempt at pinpointing the time and place of the emergence of Nidajno Style points to the *limes* zone, to areas along the middle and maybe lower Danube, and from the close of the 3rd and early 4th centuries (Central European phase C₂). In light of the individualized and non-trivial character of the decorations – as well as the inadequately advanced state of research – at present it is not possible to narrow down this area or chronology. It is, however, feasible to suggest several routes by which those items may have found their way to the Balt hinterland. One may have lead northward from the Carpathian Basin – the existence of such a route being evidenced by e.g., the equipment of the opulent burials at Wrocław-Zakrzów. An alternative path would lead through the vast areas occupied by the milieux of Goth cultures: today's western Ukraine, the Hrubieszów Basin, and eastern Mazovia. Some indirect evidence is provided by artefacts from Ukraine (with the archaeological context of their discovery being unknown) and similar fittings from the opulent burial at Pielgrzymowo. A less likely route is one leading from the west or north-west and linked with the Scandinavian zone in the Baltic Basin, in the Roman Period occupied by communities whose elites established long-range contacts with areas along the Rhine and Danubian *limes*. Associations between parade artefacts from Nidajno and the

15 Considering that the assemblage was not dispersed, a direct route seems more likely, but this is just an intuitive guess.

equipment of elite “princely” burials at Wrocław-Zakrzów and Pielgrzymowo thus point more to a southern and south-eastern axis of contacts.

One of the features of the turbulent 3rd century was the growing pressure of Barbarians upon the territories of the Roman Empire (see Alföldi 1967; Gibbon 1995; Heather 2008; 2010). Such attacks involved not only the populations of areas along the Rhine and Danube, but also warriors from tribes living in distant areas of Central Europe, and probably Scandinavia as well. This is suggested by a passage from Zosimus (*Historia nova* I, LXVII–LXVIII) on fighting along the upper Rhine, where Emperor Probus (276–282) clashed in Rhaetia with the Burgundians, Vandals, and Lugii. At that time the vanquished Vandals were settled in Britannia, although the Lugii were allowed to return to their home territories. Other groups of Barbarians were confronted along the Danube (in Moesia and Thracia): alongside Goths, Taifals, Carpi, and Peucini attacking Moesia sources mention e.g., the Hasdingi, associated with the Przeworsk Culture (Jordanes, *Getica* 91). Vandals and Goths again jointly raided Pannonia in 270, where they faced Emperor Aurelian (Zosimus, *Historia nova* I, XLVIII; SHA, *Aurel.* 33). The southern axis of Vandal actions is confirmed by the clashes between Visigoths (Thervingi) and Vandals (Hasdingi) in 290 and 344 – in the latter case marked by Vandal victory at the battle on the Marisus River (today Mureş; Jordanes, *Getica* 115; Kontny 2016a, 172–173; 2019d, 167–168). Sources mentioning Vandals-Hasdings probably also refer to those groups which had left their fatherland and settled along the upper Tisa River (Heather 2008; 2010; Kontny 2016a; 2019d; see literature there).

One of the outcomes of the ongoing stratification of society (see Lund Hansen 1995; 2000; Quast 2009c) were the opulent burials of the Hassleben–Leuna–Zakrzów horizon dated to 3rd and early 4th centuries. These are characterized by monumental form (a raised barrow with burial chamber), burial rite (inhumation), and exceptionally lavish – to some extent, standardized – equipment which included many categories of prestigious items (Quast 2009a; 2009b; 2009c; Lau 2012; 2014b). These principally included imports from the Roman Empire (sets of bronze and glass vessels for drinking wine, jewellery, and weapons) and various Barbarian areas, gold and silver items, and elements of dress which may be interpreted as insignia of rulership – gold necklaces with clasps shaped like a keyhole, gold bracelets with cob terminals, and rings decorated with stylized snake heads. Such burials are known from Central Europe and Scandinavia, and their flagship examples include – besides the eponymic sites at Wrocław-Zakrzów, Hassleben and Leuna – also Krakovany-Stráže, Osztrópataka-Ostrovany, Gommern and – associated with the Goth milieu – Pielgrzymowo and Rudka (Kokowski 2001; Klčo, Krupa 2003; Krupa et al.; Prohászka 2006; Becker 2010; Quast 2009a; 2009c; 2014; 2016; Kolník 2012; Lau 2012; 2014b; Krupa, Klčo 2015).

Such burials are not known from the West Balt area, where burial inventories do not include sets of drinking vessels or insignia of rulership, and items made from precious metals are rare¹⁶.

16 An exception here is the burial of the rider from barrow 2 at Sz wajcaria, Suwałki District, dated to phase C₂. Although it lacks attributes characteristic of the highest levels of Barbarian aristocracy, it still stands

Nevertheless, various cemeteries in this region do include lavish burials of the local elite, although none stands out to a degree as to suggest the deceased to have been a supra-regional ruler of similar stature to those buried in “princely” graves in other parts of the *Barbaricum*. The wide disparity in burial equipment in Bogaczewo Culture cemeteries points to it being far from egalitarian. Maybe the markers of prestige were different than in other Barbarian territories (inhabited by groups probably having a different organization and a more hierarchic structure), although even here we note certain inter-regional elements, such as equestrian equipment and weapons, pointing to the high status of mounted warriors (Bitner-Wróblewska 2001, 121–127; Banytė-Rowell, Bitner-Wróblewska, Reich 2012, 209–214; Bitner-Wróblewska, Rzeszotarska-Nowakiewicz 2016).

The presence of the Hassleben–Leuna–Zakrzów horizon in Central Europe may suggest that the assemblage of parade equipment came to the sacrificial bog at Nidajno from the Middle Danube. This is supported by the two Nidajno Style fittings from burial III from Wrocław-Zakrzów. The accompanying silver fittings of a Roman officer’s *cingulum* may have come there as a result of conflicts with the Romans during the reign of Aurelian (Madyda-Legutko 2016, 614).

The second of the opined routes leading from the Black Sea would require the cooperation of Goth populations. In this context one should point out contemporary changes in the human sphere of central-east Europe. In the 2nd half of the 2nd century (central European phase B₂/C₁) cemeteries of the Przeworsk Culture, identified with the later Vandals, disappear from the right bank of the middle Vistula (Kolendo 1997; Andrzejowski 2010; 2019; Kontny 2016a; see further literature there). These are replaced by settlements and cemeteries of Wielbark Culture, which gradually abandoned the areas of today’s north Poland (eastern Pomerania and northern Great Poland), moving to right-bank Mazovia, Podlasie, the Lublin region, western Belarus, Volhynia, eventually even further to the south-east – to the forest-steppe zone of Ukraine (Kokowski 1997; 2010; 2013; Cieśliński 2016; see further literature there). These lands had been abandoned by the population of the eastern zone of Przeworsk Culture, which migrated into western Slovakia, north-western Ukraine, and the basin of the upper Tisa River. In the 1st half of the 3rd century Wielbark Culture people reached even further lying areas of Ukraine and entered Moldavia. Their arrival led in c. 230 AD (phase C1b/C2) to the emergence of the multi-ethnic tribal confederation, termed the Chernyakhov Culture, which also included nomadic Sarmatians and so-called Late Scythians. According to some scholars, Goth warriors previously involved in pillaging raids upon Roman provinces in the middle of the 3rd century also were part of it (Bursche, Myzgin 2019). This culture functioned up to the beginnings of the 5th century (phase D₁), implying that it survived the first stage of the Hunnic invasion in 375 and the death of the Goth ruler Ermanaric.

out in the Balt milieu. The very form of the grave (a barrow with two, at times four layers of stones) makes it different than the objects typical of this cemetery, and the burial also contained lavish and ostentatious equipment pointing to strong links with Scandinavia. This burial was termed “princely” by researchers (Antoniewicz, Kaczyński, Okulicz 1958, 23–31, ill. 1–5, pl. I–IX; Jaskanis 2013, 76–80, pl. CXVII–CXXV; Kontny 2013; Bitner-Wróblewska, Rzeszotarska-Nowakiewicz 2016).

At the end of the 3rd century Chernyakhov Culture people settled in today's Romania (initially along the external arc of the Carpathians and on the left bank of the lower Danube) and occupied the lands of today's Moldavia and the Wallachian Plain up to the Olt River. The specific nature of the culture which emerged there, the Sântana de Mureș, was influenced by the local ethnic substrate, consisting of nomadic Sarmatians, the so-called free Dacians, the Getae, and Carpi (Kokowski 2009; 2010; 2013; Cieśliński 2016). Its oldest remains are dated to the 2nd half of the 3rd century (phase C2), and its disappearance to the 1st half of the 5th century (phase D2; Kokowski 2013).

Processes initiated by the migration of Wielbark Culture people through the lands between the Baltic and Black Seas produced an extensive contact zone, at times termed the Black Sea route. Groups of people migrated along it – in both directions – transmitting cultural impulses between the North and South. One of the key players in this process was the population of the Maślomęcka Group from the Hrubieszów Basin. This cultural unit emerged at the junction of communication routes (by water – along the Bug, and by land – from Mazovia to Volhynia) at some point after 180 AD (phase B₂/C₁) and functioned up to phase D₁. Throughout its existence it functioned as a contact zone, as evidenced by Roman, Balt, Sarmatian, Dacian, and Scandinavian imports. The presence of such ware was probably also connected with the inhabitants' commercial activity (e.g., as intermediaries in the exchange of amber, wool, salt, and non-ferrous metals on their way south: to the Goths, Sarmatian, Bosporan Kingdom, and Roman cities on the Black Sea coast, and in the trade in glass vessels, these going north, to Scandinavia). Exploration of Maślomęcka Group cemeteries confirms that this community was a cultural melting pot, where besides Goths we note the presence of Sarmatians, Vandals, Dacians, and Balts (Kokowski 2009; 2013; Niezabitowska-Wiśniewska 2009; 2023).

The appearance of the Wielbark cultural model on the Black Sea coast is linked – as mentioned in the accounts of Roman historians – to the pillaging of the Balkan provinces by Goth tribes (the first town to be plundered was Histria in 238; see Kolendo 1984; 2008). It was in such circumstances that the Goths captured the Imperial treasury, probably during their victorious battle at *Abritus* (around today's Razgrad in Bulgaria) in 251. This was the first instance of a Roman Emperor – Decius – falling in battle with Barbarians (Radoslavova, Dzanev, Nikolov 2011; Bursche 2013; Bursche, Myzgin 2019; Cieśliński 2016). Goths appeared in the Crimea c. 250, attacking Kerch between 252 and 254 AD. By 261 they had reached the southern tip of the peninsula whence, from 268, they carried out pirate attacks against provinces in Asia Minor (Jordanes, *Getica*). Thus 3rd century Goths function as a well-organized, multi-ethnic community, united around an attractive programme whose main objective, initially at least, was the organization of plundering raids against the Roman Empire (Bursche 2013; Cieśliński 2016; see further literature there).

The functioning of Goth military organization in today's western Ukraine and participation of its members in raids upon the Balkans (culminating in the looting of *Nikopolis*, Histria, Philipopolis, and their victory at *Abritus*) is confirmed by mass finds of *aureus* in the Chernyakhov

Culture area, interpreted as once part of the several-ton Imperial treasury which Emperor Decius intended to use to pay out *donativa* to soldiers after a victorious battle (Bursche 2013; Bursche, Myzgin 2019)¹⁷. Probably as a result of such raids, veterans were permanently settled in Thracia and Moesia, in order to counteract the growing threat (Bursche, Myzgin 2019).

Many sources point out the dominant role of Germanic warbands hailing from Central-East Europe in the invasions which, starting in the middle of the 3rd century, eventually led to the disaster at Adrianopolis and the fall of the Western Roman Empire, in the political sense at least (Heather 2020; see further literature there). The latest studies on the spread of middle 3rd-century *aureus* taken by Goth warbands at *Abritus* and imitation gold coins stuck with stamps looted at *Alexandria Troas* during the invasion of Asia Minor when Galien was emperor) unequivocally confirm the role of Goths in these events. The results also corroborate the Goths' links with Late Antiquity archaeological cultures located between the southern shore of the Baltic and the Black Sea (Bursche 2013; Bursche, Myzgin 2015; 2017; 2019; МЫЗГИН 2016; 2018; Bursche et al. 2020).

These findings change our perception of developments inside the Central European *Barbaricum*, far away from the Roman-Barbarian war zone. Warriors from the entire territory settled by Goths in the 2nd half of the 3rd century (phase C₂) returned to their homes – some of which were quite far north – laden with loot. The gold they brought home found its way into the workshops of local goldsmiths, in effect producing a sharp increase in the quantity of this metal in burials. Such finds come mostly from the areas occupied by the Chernyakhov Culture in central and western Ukraine, as attested by concentrations of Roman bronze wares, military diplomas, and coins from provincial Balkan mints looted c. 250 AD in provinces along the lower Danube. The war spoils may have included highly qualified Roman artisans (Bursche 2013; Bursche, Myzgin 2019, 228).

Hence this is the cultural and political context of the “trek” of the unique, parade military equipment into the Balt hinterland, to today's Mazury. The latest research by Bartosz Kontny (2019c) shows that Balt warriors, including those from communities of the Bogaczewo Culture, participated in raids organized by Germanic chieftains during the Roman Empire's crisis (in 235–284) by joining their warbands (Lat. *comitatus*, Ger. *Gefolgschaft*). It thus is in the realm of the possible that the valuables discovered at Nidajno found their way there directly as loot brought home by a Balt warrior returning from a successful campaign. Such a theory does not, however, explain the form and – principally – the scale of rituals recorded at Lake Nidajno. These seem to be a variant of customs known from northern Germanic bogs in Jutland and suggest the existence of shared beliefs and customs. It is precisely this element which suggests that practices related with the ceremonial sinking of parade elements of equipment were driven by a group and not by an individual need, something which points more to a Germanic community (possibly

17 A separate question is the presence of *aureus* imitations, including numerous examples made with original Roman mint stamps (research and findings by Aleksander Bursche, Kyrlo Myzgin and Tomasz Więcek).

Balt or of mixed ethnic composition, yet following behaviour codes deeply ingrained in Germanic tradition). An important factor also is the location of the Nidajno bog, at the centre of the then flourishing settlement grouping of Bogaczewo Culture in the Mrągowo Lakeland, and also at the headwaters of the Dajna River. For homecoming warriors this might have been either the end of their journey (if Balts) or a major milestone (if Germanic tribesmen). In the latter case the north-flowing Dajna was the most convenient route between the southern reaches of the Balt area and the Baltic (the Dajna–Guber–Łyna–Pregoła river system)¹⁸. Hence Nidajno was in an area whose importance may be compared (*toutes proportions gardées*) to early Medieval portages.

The above musings are purely conjectural, with the identification of the ethnicity of the people involved in the rituals at Nidajno, the routes through which the deposited wares found their way there, and the motivations behind such a decision not being possible at present. The available data does allow for the identification of the cultural context of these events and placement in the realities of the period. We may hope that the results of further studies will provide us with a clearer picture.

10.4. Non stylistic impact of emergence of Nidajno Style in Mazury/ Old Prussia for the Balt and Germanic cultural milieux

The ritual carried out at Lake Nidajno, regardless of the details of the rites involved, consisted of the intentional and conspicuous discarding of valuables – this not detracting from the evident religious context related with the votive/sacrificial aspect of this act.

Similar practices are well known and attested by myriad examples from the repository of cultural anthropology. The flagship example is the famous *potlatch* from the north-west coast of North America. This was a custom followed by Kwakiutl Indians, involving the destruction of valuables previously gathered expressly for this purpose. The act was witnessed by observers who also were rivals in such a duel for prestige. The competitors, shamed by the symbolical power flowing from the host's ceremonial destruction of their property, later had an opportunity for "revenge" when, at a specific time, they in turn assumed the role of hosts and could destroy their property in an even more spectacular manner – naturally, under the gaze of invited guests. The rivalry between various groups of Kwakiutl in the practice *potlatch* (actually in a rule-determined custom of auction, leading to the constantly increasing value of destroyed goods) was so ferocious, that at times it threatened the economic foundations of these communities' survival¹⁹ (Benedict 1999). A sim-

18 This route bypassed the lower Vistula area, a fact possibly of relevance, considering the freshly discovered remains of communities in Kuyavia which possessed major potential, military included (Kontny, Rudnicki 2016; 2020; Kontny 2023; Rudnicki, M., Rudnicki, M. 2020).

19 Marvin Harris described this phenomena thus: "The strangest example of rivalry over status was discovered among American Indians once inhabiting the coast of south Alaska, British Columbia, and the state of Washington. This competition for prestige involved something appearing to be a maniacal form of conspicuous consumption and waste, known as potlatch. The objective of *potlatch* was to give away or destroy more valuables than one's rival. If the host of the *potlatch* was a powerful chief, he could try

ilar custom – named *moka* – had been observed in eastern Papua New Guinea. There it involved mutual gifts of pigs – the fundamental commodity in that cultural sphere – with the ritualized system of exchange leading to the gift giver gaining prestige more than the recipient. If the recipient did not reciprocate with an even more valuable gift (thus initiating a growing spiral of increasingly valuable gifts), then he lost prestige (Strathern 1971). The common feature of *potlatch*, *moka* and other similar customs was not only the ritualized “spreading” of prestige, the underlying purpose of the concept, but also the social aspect of such publicly held ceremonies.

Remains of similar behaviour in the ancient *Barbaricum* – close to the analyzed materials from Nidajno – had been discovered in southern Scandinavia and on the south-eastern coast of the Baltic. Group finds of votive sacrifices from Scandinavia (Illerup Ådal, Nydam, Thorsberg, Vimose, Ejsbøl and others; Pauli Jensen 2009; 2022), from Pomerania (Żarnowiec, Buczek, Lubanowo; Nowakiewicz ed. 2016b; Kontny 2016b; 2022; 2023; Kontny et al. 2016), from lands occupied by Finnic (Kohtla in Estonia; Oras 2010; Oras, Kriiska 2010; Tvauri et al. 2018) or Balt tribes (Kokmuiža, Vilikumuiža in Latvia; Bliujienė 2010; Oras 2010; Radiņš 2012; Nowakiewicz 2017, 49). In spite of all the differentiating features, these discoveries are evidence of the functioning of ceremonies with a social dimension, carried out not as part of personal relations with the *sacrum*, but were performed as part of a community, this being the composite “subject” of such a relationship. It is possible that some sort of personal rivalry may have been involved.

The universal character of these rituals – both ancient and (almost) contemporary – reveals the phenomena intrinsically linked with the drive to display prestige, power, and wealth. In such a context it is justified to ask about the social impact of such rituals, an impact which is manifest in material and non-material culture, in spite of the unquestionable identification of cause-effect connections probably being limited. Regardless of such constraints, it may be assumed that the phenomena of ritual destruction and sinking of hundreds of prestigious items in a bog did not leave non-sacral aspects of local culture unaffected.

Social impact among Balt peoples

The military character of the Nidajno deposit points to prestigious ceremonies of sinking weaponry and other valuable items principally involving groups of warriors, groups possessing an internal structure and hierarchy (one not excluding the participation of individuals from outside such a circle). Their identification is possible only in a few exceptional cases²⁰, although the existence of such groups of warriors – probably created *ad hoc* to carry out some military mission – is beyond doubt.

to shame his competitors and achieve lasting awe among his underlings by destroying food, clothing or wealth. On occasion in the pursuit of prestige he could burn down his own house” (Harris 2007, 684).

20 For instance like the latest discoveries at Illerup Ådal (Kontny 2016a; 2016c; see further literature there).

The large number of elements of military equipment at Nidajno (so far over 300 fragments have been found, while we are still at the stage of preliminary exploration of the site) is proof of the local community not being without some military potential, although the finds may not be used to assess this potential's scale or character. In other words, we do not know if the destroyed weaponry had been spoils taken from aggressors, if it had been brought to the site by some migratory group, or if it was possibly part of the local arsenal – and if yes, how large a territory produced such an arsenal? A further problem is posed by the lack of adequately precise tools which could clarify the issue of the multi-phase usage of the site and – should this be confirmed – the frequency of such rituals. In light of the above, it is not possible at present to evaluate the scale of sacrifices (it just as well could have been a single, lavish and magnificent ceremony involving the destruction of masses of weaponry, or a series of offerings repeated in intervals of e.g., several years and involving the destruction of lesser numbers of items).

Obtaining a fuller picture of the region's military potential is further hindered by the cultural area which included Nidajno lacking any other archaeological record attesting to the existence of military elites. In Bogaczewo Culture (and the Mrągowo cluster of this culture) one may note a – typical for the era – differentiation of burial equipment, yet no burial may be labelled as “opulent” (these are at best burials of warriors with above average quantities of equipment²¹). Nor did exploration of settlements and of the entire area used for settlement purposes produce any finds of explicit “chieftain seats”. Multiyear studies of Bogaczewo Culture point to its characteristic feature being a lack of evolution of burial rituals (up to the beginning of the Migration Period) and traditional, egalitarian settlements.

Thus the Nidajno deposit gains additional proof for its unique character – not only due to the size or character of its material component – but also as an example of a cultural phenomena whose interpretation enriches our perception of the social structure of the inhabitants of Mazury/Old Prussia and the forms in which they satisfied their religious-cultural needs in the Roman Period. Or at least that of certain groups inside that community.

The issue of the ritual's continuity

The idea of depositing valuables in water or bogs was not alien to the Balt area of the *Barbaricum*²², although the nature of possible links between those traditions and the emergence of the Nidajno site remains unclear. The reason is the highly preliminary state of archaeological exploration of the Nidajno site and the lack of unequivocal data pointing to factors initiating such activity. Neverthe-

21 The unique find of Roman iron fetters in a richly equipped burial at Mojtyny (at less than 10 km distance from Nidajno) is interpreted as a *curiosum* and not the mark of the deceased's profession (Czarnecka 2013).

22 This is attested by the significant number of assemblages of jewellery and elements of prestige conferring weaponry from the Bronze and early Iron Age discovered in “wet” environments (when draining boggy meadows, at locations with “Moor” as part of placename etc.) in Mazury/Old Prussia (Nowakiewicz 2017).

less, the question of the relationship between the cult site at Nidajno with other locations evincing the aquatic sacrifices of weapons and jewellery in Old Prussia (in particular) or – more broadly – in Balt-occupied lands in general is fascinating and worth pursuing.

In this context one must foremost mention a site which to date had been the best illustration of a similar phenomena in Old Prussia, i.e., the former Wolka-See (Wólka, Kętrzyn District), known from archived material. The deposit from Wólka had been analyzed several times and described in the literature (Raddatz 1993; Kontny 2015; Nowakiewicz 2017, 33–35), hence there is no need to present it in detail. It is only worth mentioning that when lake Wólka (Wolka-See) was drained in the first half of the 19th century it yielded, in a practically unknown context, a deposit of weapons which included six blades of different types of swords. Two were of type Lauriacum-Hromówka acc. Biborski and Ilkjær (2006a) and Miks [2007], one of type Straubing-Nydam acc. Miks, one probably of type Lachmirowice-Apa acc. Biborski (Biborski, Ilkjær 2006a) plus two more examples, not illustrated in archived materials and thus impossible to identify. Additionally it included a socketed axe type Kontny II, two shield bosses (types Jahn 8 and Jahn 9), a shield grip type Jahn 9, a broken spur, a bit with circular bit rings, an unidentified iron plate, and finally an open bronze bracelet with repeated simple herringbone pattern (Kontny 2015, 308–320). The deposit²³ from Wólka may be broadly dated – from phase B2 to C2 (or even up to phases C3–D), although it is possible that these chronological brackets could be sharply contracted to phase C1a–C1b (Kontny 2015).

Going by such data it is difficult to define the chronological relationship between the deposits from Nidajno and Wolka-See. Moreover, due to the loss of materials from Wólka and limited possibility for re-examination of the Wolka-See site it is unlikely that this will ever be possible. The one thing that is certain is that the two were deposited in the same period, although it is not possible to say which had been dumped in a lake first. Nevertheless the two sites unquestionably illustrate a highly similar phenomenon, one additionally registered in close proximity (separated by 40 km as the crow flies, i.e., a distance which can be covered by foot in a single day)²⁴.

The sparsity of data makes conclusions in this regard not only speculative, but alternative as well. One might assume that either both cemeteries were inspired by the same events (this implying their greater impact on local communities), or one was a copy of a previously executed scenario. In the latter case it may be assumed that it was the ritual at Nidajno which was emulated at Wólka. This is suggested by their relative locations – materials of southern origin (such as those

23 Due to the unknown circumstances of discovery and the dispersion of the assemblage in the 19th century already, plus the loss of artefacts, viewing the finds from Wólka as a concentrated assemblage would be questionable from a methodological point of view (Kontny 2015).

24 And thus the results of research at Nidajno became a *sui generis* argument supporting the correctness of such interpretation of the materials from Wólka.

making part of the deposits) had an easier route to Nidajno than to the more northerly Wólka²⁵. This might also be indicated by the larger number of finds at Nidajno (although the different circumstances of discovery advice caution as to the formulation of conclusions in regard to this issue) and by the – still mostly unidentified – elements of infrastructure discovered on Nidajno’s shores. Most likely there was a wooden reinforcement of lake shore, thus evidencing long term and not *ad hoc* use of the site. That observation is supported by the high share of Balt items, typical for Bogaczewo Culture (*fibulae*, pendants), in the Nidajno deposit.

In light of available data it is indisputable that Wólka is the sole relevant point of reference for Nidajno in the Old Prussia/Mazury area. Other artefacts from that region associated with an aquatic context are known solely from archive sources, and mostly consist of single finds of spearheads (Lake Tałty and former Lake Wąż in the Great Lakes District, plus Lake Średnie in the Mrągowo Lakeland) or coin deposits (Lakes Dejguny and Mamry; Nowakiewicz 2017, 38–40 – older literature there).

Comparing the finds from Nidajno with other deposits from Lett-Lithuanian and Finnic lands does not produce satisfactory explanations either. Although Nidajno artefacts share formal similarities with the two impressively-sized deposits from Kokmuiža in south-east Curland in Latvia (see Nowakiewicz 2017, 49, foot. 45) and smaller discoveries from Finnic areas (e.g., Rikassaare, Kohtla, and Kunda in Estonia; Tvauri 2009; Oras 2010; Oras, Kriiska 2013; Tvauri et al. 2018), the differences in dating must be pointed out²⁶. Nor was there any cause-effect noted between the finds from Nidajno and the smaller deposits from Lithuania or Latvia (Bliujienė 2010). Yet it is possible to find appropriate formal and chronological parallels between Nidajno and the “zone” of sacrificial bogs in today’s Denmark, Germany, and Sweden.

At present everything points to the – confirmed for Nidajno and Wólka – custom of the mass sinking of previously destroyed valuable elements of weaponry and jewellery being relatively short lived and of a highly regionalized character (it embraced not even all of Prussia/Mazury, but just around Mrągowo)²⁷. Such deposits are testimony to a much more complex than previously thought aspect of contemporary social reality. Yet at present there is no evidence for these deposits leading to changes in social structure (e.g., more pronounced social stratification), with the prestigious “warrior customs” registered at Nidajno and suspected for Wólka being later continued with equal intensity. What cannot be dismissed is the development of different manners of manifestations of prestige, manners not leaving spectacular material evidence²⁸.

25 It should be pointed out that both sites are close to the course of the river Dajna (although it does not flow through Wólka, but nearby), this being relevant in the context of communication routes between them.

26 The chronological extent of the deposits from Kokmuiža, Kohtla, and Rikassaare covers the entire Migration Period (Bliujienė 2010; Oras 2010).

27 With all the caveats that arise from the current state of the research.

28 This is well illustrated by the younger, yet striking example from Salme II ship burial in Estonia, where

Later contacts of the Olsztyn Group

It is worth pointing out the intriguing, although currently impossible to verify, possible correlation of the spectacular rite conducted at Nidajno with the circumstances shaping some of the leading features of the Olsztyn Group. It is probable that members of Germanic tribes had been present at the Nidajno ceremony, and whose presence in Balt areas was not necessarily incidental. The influence of the neighbouring Germanic milieu (Wielbark Culture) is regarded as being the cause of the disappearance of weapons from burial equipment in the Olsztyn Group – hence such influence must have been strong enough to have an impact on naturally conservative funerary traditions. This was linked with the conferring of new, special meaning to iron (iron weaponry) in the symbolical world of Balt inhabitants of Old Prussia/Mazury. Thus, could the unprecedented, close relations of those societies with southern and western Europe, visible from the start of the Migration Period, resulting in the inflow of sizeable quantities of luxury items, have had any connection with the rites previously practised at Nidajno?

Major circumstantial evidence in support of such a theory is that the Danubian *limes* zone – the origin of the Nidajno assemblage – was one of the sources of imports which defined the uniqueness of the material culture of the Olsztyn Group. The imported wares were mostly luxury products, although of a broader repertoire than the Nidajno assemblage, e.g., including parade *fibulae*. Although the time difference – the fundamental argument *contra* – between those phenomena is quite substantial, it nevertheless is still inside the range of the transfer of tradition (it can be compared to the distance between today and the fall of the Polish First Republic/Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth). Such a theory of a “distant echo” can only be confirmed by further research.

In light of presently available data the immediate effects of the ceremonies conducted at Nidajno at the end of the 3rd or in the early 4th century (or better – the series of events leading to them) appear to be limited. Yet their long term impact, especially in the non-material cultural sphere, cannot be ruled out. Only future research – both at Nidajno and in the entire region – may give us a fuller picture. In the case of the former, the most important objectives would be exploring additional, less accessible parts of the former cult site and gathering more artefacts (which would allow e.g., verification of this being a single- or multi-phase site), while in the latter – the potential discovery of sites similar to those of Nidajno and Wólka, thus giving grounds to regard the sinking of weapons and other valuable objects in Old Prussia/Mazury as a cultural standard and not some spectacular exception.

the “king” of a warband of Scandinavian invaders, buried with standard combat equipment, was identified by his burial being equipped by a *hnefial* royal piece placed in his mouth (Konsa 2013; Peets et al. 2013; Lóugas, Luik eds. 2023).

11. Conclusion and ideas for further research

The objective of this book was to define a relevant element of a new phenomenon registered during archaeological excavations at the Nidajno bog in the Mazury Lakeland (Czaszkowo, site 1). This site is the first place in Poland where modern archaeological methods unearthed remains of Roman Period cult practices involving the sinking of weapons and other prestigious elements of warriors' personal equipment in a boggy lake. Deposits of such items point to Balt people (in this case, ones hailing from Bogaczevo Culture) practising the ceremonial sacrifice of valuable items (which previously had been intentionally destroyed) of a clearly military purpose in an aquatic environment during the Iron Age. All recorded features of the site at Nidajno point towards its similarity to a model known from the northern European *Barbaricum* and represented by Jutland sacrificial bogs, such as e.g., Illerup Ådal, Nydam, Thorsberg, Vimose, Ejsbøl, Porskjær, and others. The noticeable differences (like the lack of animal remains) may be explained by the Nidajno site being but preliminarily explored, or by this being a regional variation of the custom. The explanation of this and other questions will be possible after further exploration seasons.

The category most numerously represented in the Nidajno assemblage is military related, and among them most prevalent are the iron heads of polearms. Also present are fragments of blades of double-edged swords (including pattern welded examples), a bronze sword scabbard chape, 20 different size fragments of chainmail, 15 fragments of knives, 5 fragments of shield-bosses, a fragment of an axe, 2 fragments of iron spurs, and 3 fragments of bridles. Elements of personal equipment were relatively rare: 11 buckles, 5 bronze fibulae, 20 fibulae fragments, 4 bucket-shaped pendants, 3 pendants with triangular bottom, a fragment of a comb, a fragment of whetstone, plus a number of small, difficult to identify destructs. Against such a backdrop of finds a group of valuable and prestigious items stands out, the emblematic components of the assemblage's inventory: 9 richly decorated silver, gilded, and blackened with *niello* fittings; a silver, openwork strap divider; a fragment of a silver box *phalera*; 2 golden fittings of a sword crossguard and of a sword scabbard throat; a sword bead, a silver, gilded bird figurine; and two fragments of a glass vessel of Syrian origin (as confirmed by laboratory analysis). Their origin, craftsmanship, and styling testify to links between this distant (even if measured only to the *limes*) part of the northern European *Barbaricum* and the Mediterranean area of Classic Ancient Culture.

The study presented here focuses upon an assemblage of silver fittings, gilded and decorated with *niello*: a buckle with ferrule with the depiction of a lion and birds (no. 1), the fragment of an analogous buckle with a frame decorated with a bird head (no. 2), rectangular fittings with depictions of: a lion (no. 3), a lion and bird (no. 4) and a bird (no. 5); a rectangular fitting with a geometric pattern (no. 6) a large rectangular fitting with depictions of a dolphin, capricorn, two gryphons, and a dragon (no. 7); a large palmetto fitting with two mythological beasts and bird

heads (no. 8); a rectangular fitting-pendant with a fish (no. 9); and a silver, openwork strap divider (no. 10). These items evince a high unity in form, in materials used (high *finesse specie*), and in craftsmanship (all made with the same techniques: casting, stamping, etching, engraving, gilding, decoration with *niello*). Thus, these may be used as the basal reference point for further analysis. The analysis did not ignore other items from the assemblage of elite finds. The silver, gilded box *phalera* (no. 15) was included in the examination of the utilitarian aspect of the entire assemblage, while the impressive, yet lacking common stylistic features with the above-defined assemblage, gold fittings of a sword scabbard throat (no. 11) and sword cross guard (no. 12) plus the silver, gilded bird figure (no. 14) and silver buckle (no. 16) were used as aids in further analysis.

The characteristic features of the assemblage of jewellery from Nidajno are: they are made from expensive materials; they exhibit advanced decoration techniques (amalgamation, soldering and gilding techniques, *niello*, a large variety of punches); they evince a well-developed, unconventional, and refined exquisite repertoire of figural motifs, drawing upon themes deeply ingrained in the heterogenous tradition of the Roman Empire. The stylistically consistent items (subject to this analysis) were accompanied by additional prestigious elements (gold fittings of a parade sword, a sword pendant, a vulture/eagle figurine, a glass chalice from Syrian workshops) which underscore the insignia-like character of the assemblage.

The main method used in this work – archaeological comparative analysis – was enriched with stylistic-iconographic research covering most of the European *Barbaricum* and neighbouring Roman provinces (mostly those along the Rhine and Danube rivers). This allowed for the comparison of rarely used data from the trove of information produced by research into the material culture and spirituality of Barbarian societies of Central and Northern Europe with the material image of the Roman army (with special emphasis on the presence of soldiers of Barbarian origin in it). Tools from the workshop of art historians were used here as well, aiding in the orderly description of formally and stylistically complex, lavishly decorated items with multi-faceted iconographic content. The result was not only a catalogue-like description of the items, but also a database of the cultural background of the time of their crafting, of the mixing of motifs and decorative themes, as well as the broadly understood cultural diffusion typical of the late Antiquity in the Roman Empire. The book also examines the technological and technical aspect of the stylistic features of the fittings. These includes not only decorations made by punching with 15 types of stamps (including decorative bordiures or elements of figural presentations), but also the polychromic effect produced by the juxtaposing of silver, gold, and black surfaces.

Use of stylistic and iconographic criteria identified the analyzed items' nearest analogies: belt fittings from the "princely" burials from the northern *Barbaricum* (Wrocław-Zakrzów, burial III, and Pielgrzymowo, barrow HG1) plus finds of an unknown archaeological context from Ukraine. In turn the stylistic inspiration for the Nidajno fittings may be seen in the silver, gilded, and decorated with *niello* fittings of Roman officers' belts and sword scabbards from the Roman Empire

that are dated to the late 3rd century AD. Iconographic analysis of figural, anthropo- and zoomorphic decorations of the palmetto fitting with two hybrids and birds (no. 8), the “five beasts” fitting (no. 7) as well as the buckles and fittings with animal presentations (nos. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, and 9) points to their varied associations with materials from the European *Barbaricum* and the Roman Empire (foremost the Danubian and Rhenish provinces), but the strongest connotations link them to the broadly understood military milieu of the *limes* zone.

Analysis of the palmetto fitting no. 8 was the most fruitful in producing data. The design on the item may be divided into three zones: the first consists of the palmetto’s crown formed by pairs of bird heads, the second – the motif of a stretched animal hide and the hippocampus placed in it, while the third contains the equine-human hybrid (*gryllos*) together with the motif of an *aedicula* (a temple niche) with the accompanying lunar theme.

As part of the comparative analysis, this fitting was compared with Roman palmetto or tree-shaped votive plaques with presentations of deities in the *aedicula*. It also referenced other thematic and stylistic parallels: Roman trefoil horse harness pendants, metal vessels of type Eggers 121, ceremonial shields, miniature stretched hide-shaped pendants and fittings, plus parade chankrons alluding to the stretched hide form (often simplified and geometrized). Of special note in this context – and also included in the analysis – were presentations of stretched animal hides on frescoes and *crustulum* (baking form) connected to gladiatorial combat. This overview was complemented with ethnographic data on the symbolism of the stretched hide motif, as seen on shields of Intore warriors (Rwanda), Tuareg shields and amulets, and in the art of North American Indians and the Afshar people (Iran). Analysis of the incidence of the *gryllos* motif showed that it appears in an arrangement similar to the one of the Nidajno fitting on items of Roman (e.g., on votive figurines of Mars and Jupiter in Corinthian helmets) and Barbarian origin, as well as in depictions of Sassanian rulers. The accompanying *aedicula* motif is quite commonplace on Roman votive plaques and elements of parade armour; the three triangular stamps crowned with crescents (placed underneath the *aedicula*’s arch) had analogies in details placed on Roman *stelae* and depictions of the holy *Mount Argaeus* in Cappadocia on coins struck in Caesarea Mazaca (a similar motif was also present in the coinage of the Western Satraps in India).

Analysis of the animal chase motif from fitting no. 7 revealed numerous similarities with Hellenistic and Roman *phalerae*, belt fittings, sword scabbards and elements of horse harness, as well as Hemmoor type buckets manufactured in Roman provincial workshops. The motif of the dragon was compared with the military presentations of the Roman *draco*, while the depictions of lions (fittings nos. 1, 3, and 4), heads of geese or swans (frames of buckles nos. 1 and 2), and fish (fitting no. 9) were examined in the context of decorations placed on Roman military belt fittings, metal vessels, votive tablets, and *stelae*. The use of a broad comparative spectrum allowed for the identification of decorations of severely damaged fittings as showing helmeted guineafowl (*Numida meleagris*) and peacocks (respectively nos. 4 and 5).

It is possible to discern elements of Roman decorative traditions (stylistic and iconographic) in the parade finds from Nidajno, thus confirming their close ties with the canon of Roman art (which corresponds with the results of laboratory analysis showing these decorations being made from homogenous and high quality raw materials). These elements are the palmetto (“tree of life”), *gryllos*, *aedicula*, astral elements, stretched hide motif, hippocampus, animal chase motif (actual and mythological beasts), and zoomorphic presentations (lions, fish and birds).

The patterns from Nidajno are present in Roman art mostly in decorations of weaponry and of some utilitarian items. These are found on four categories of artefacts: 1. elements of personal military equipment and weapons (parts of military belts, horse harness, parade armour – helmets, greaves, chanfrons); 2. some items related with the spiritual sphere (both military and civilian cults), such as votive plaques and tablets or figurines; 3. certain types of luxury metal tableware (serving plates of type Eggers 121 and Hemmoor type buckets); 4. *gemmae* with magical properties (apotropaic).

There is an apparent connection between motifs and types of items on which these were used. For instance, presentations of the animal chase motif are placed on military equipment (this motif, with roots in the Hellenistic tradition of the Black Sea area and in Thracia, first appeared on Roman personal military equipment in the 1st century AD, as indicated by *cingulae* fittings type B.4.a acc. Hoss and *gladius* scabbards). The motif of the stretched animal hide also shows strong links with military equipment (it is noted on shields, fittings of military belts, on chanfrons; it can be indirectly linked with the context of gladiator combat, e.g., the *Viminacium* amphitheatre frescoes, and *crustulum*, and possibly also pendants-amulets of such shape). The most evident connection is seen between the motif of the palmetto (palm leaf) with 3rd-century silver and gold votive plaques found along the Roman *limes*.

A characteristic feature of the assemblage of fittings from Nidajno is the wealth of motifs used and their creative combination on elements of personal equipment. This is testimony to the artistic creativity and imagination of their maker, and probably also an expression of some more profound idea. The images decorating the analyzed assemblage were not a simple combination of patterns lifted off the catalogues with canonic ornament. The depictions were almost certainly selected in line with the preferences of the future user (experimentation with the form or content of ornament in an item of such class is rather unlikely). The zoomorphic presentations give the impression of being part of some larger, complex narrative – which at the present state of research remains cloaked to us. The multi-tiered interpretation also extends to the anthropomorphic presentation – the *gryllos* – which was placed in an original and unique manner in the *aedicula*, i.e., a location where it was customary to put the image of a deity or hero.

In spite of the incomplete and fragmented state of the assemblage is it unquestionable that the themes (and thus the symbology) of decorations from Nidajno were overwhelmingly influenced by decorations of elite Roman protective equipment, as well as depictions from cult-related presen-

tations discovered at Roman military camps and their surroundings along the Rhenish-Danubian *limes*. This is evidenced by the use of the animal chase motif and the choice of species depicted (lions, birds, fish, dolphin, capricorns, hippocampuses, and gryphons), of presenting the dragon in the manner of a Roman *draco*, and the stretched hide motif, associated with the repertoire of decorations used on parade equipment (chiefly officer belts and horse harnesses) – plus the form and symbology of Roman military standards.

Analysis of the palmetto fitting in the context of Roman religious practices reveals strong connotations between this artefact and palmetto or palm-leaf-shaped votive plaques. The placement of the *gryllos* in the *aedicula* and arrangement of accompanying elements suggests that the *gryllos* is not a peer of the other elements – the crown of the “tree of life” (celestial element?) and the hippocampus on the hide of the killed animal (chthonic element?) – but is their superior. The special importance of the *gryllos* was additionally emphasized by the astral motif, suggestive of its divine status, and giving ground to assumptions that it presents a deity paramount to other spheres symbolized by the other presentations. Such an interpretation is supported by the form of the item: regardless of how it was used (probably as a chanfron from a horse harness or a pendant in some other location), the *gryllos* is positioned correctly, unlike the hippocampus, tree crown, and birds. It is worth mentioning that the doubled equine motif of the palmetto fitting might be associated with the presentations of the Danubian Riders and the Thracian Horseman, known from votive plaques and grave *stelae* (and also accompanied by numerous zoomorphic motifs, animal chase included). The accumulation of these elements may have served to reinforced the apotropaic intent of the item.

One of the objectives of the undertaken iconographic study was to discover potential sources of inspiration for the patterns decorating the artefacts from Nidajno. Analysis pointed to the above-mentioned elements “coming together” probably in the 3rd century in provinces along the middle Danube, specifically in Dacia, Moesia, and Pannonia. Iconographic and stylistic features of the assemblage suggest it was crafted at a goldsmith’s workshop in the vicinity of a military centre on the *limes*. On the other hand, the features of the arrangement of the palmetto crown and presentations of the animal chase motif point to the maker – or designer – of the assemblage having drawn additional inspiration from motifs decorating metal wares (serving plates of type Eggers 121) and Hemmoor-type buckets. Such items were manufactured mostly during the 1st half of the 3rd century in workshops in provinces along the Rhine and in Gaul, and appeared in larger number on the middle Danube in the middle of that century after the redeployment of Roman military units from the Rhenish provinces. It may be assumed with some degree of probability that the Nidajno assemblage – with strongly marked military symbolism, and not free from sacral aspects (legionary military cults) – was commissioned by a Roman officer (or a veteran?), maybe from the *auxilia*, and stationed on the middle Danube. The plain “equine” motif of the palmetto and functional identification of several other prestigious elements (strap divider, silver buckle,

and silver-coated spur) give ground to theorizing that it had belonged to an officer in the cavalry.

The ornamentation used on the Nidajno assemblage must have been to the taste of Barbarians with contacts with Roman provincial areas (as evidenced by the e.g., two fittings made in the same style discovered at Wrocław-Zakrzów, burial III). Various figural motifs (especially zoomorphic) were adopted by Barbarian artisans round the middle of the 3rd century, becoming an attractive mode of expressing content going beyond ordinary decorative functions. Such a phenomena may be associated with e.g., the decoration of the shield-boss facings from Herpály, the plaques from Osztrópataka-Ostrovany, and the shields and plaque from Thorsberg, whose figural motifs were inspired by Imperial Period Roman provincial products. Such items doubtlessly were signs of the user's high stature, and presumably also the supra-regional range of that person's connections. However, it should be noted that in spite of iconographic proximity to the fittings from Nidajno, the differences in styling and workmanship precludes regarding them as making part of the same phenomena. The Nidajno assemblage definitely belongs among products of provincial Roman workshops, and not among their Barbarian imitations.

Overall, the Roman manner of depicting animals in Late Antiquity does not seem to be that distant from Germanic concepts. This was doubtlessly influenced by the interaction between these two universes – the intensity of which increased every decade during the 3rd, 4th, and 5th centuries. The result was that in the waning years of the Empire the Roman iconographic message was also legible to Germanic people – both those living beyond the *limes* and those who had been Roman citizens for generations. Roman iconography evolved in light of changing circumstances as well. This did not limit the use of the still understandable (also in symbolic convention) zoomorphic ornamentation. Hence these motifs lived on, even if in their semantic content the archaic idea of animalistic powers was replaced with a new cultural and religious context.

The assemblage from Nidajno is testimony to a larger and more complex process. The designs and motifs used to decorate these artefacts were not unknown in the *Barbaricum*: in lands beyond the *limes* these not only were adopted, imitating their formal features, but also were adapted to meet the needs of the class with high social stature, economic status, and military rank. The preferences of this elite had a key role in the spread of figural art in Barbarian milieux. In at least some cases Barbarian workshops used original Roman tools, and at times manufacture probably also involved Roman artisans, additionally leading to the differentiation and individualization of motifs and patterns found in various examples of Barbarian imitative art.

The results from analysis of accompanying artefacts provide a different point of view to examine the stylistically consistent assemblage from Nidajno. Firstly, the findings confirmed the prestigious rank of this assemblage and, in light of the iconographic and stylistic similarity (and confirmation of the already proven uniformity of used materials), these may be considered as elements of a single large set of items. Several different zoomorphic patterns have been identified on these items: on the gold fitting of sword scabbard throat (no. 11) – two pairs of lions and four birds and,

from the same set, the gold fitting of a sword crossguard (no. 12) – a pair of birds and two pairs of dolphins. The realistic full metal cast bird figurine (no. 14) was interpreted as depicting a bird of prey, probably a vulture or an eagle, used as a *signum* (the figurine was intended for mounting on a shaft) and inspired by Roman *aquila* or temple votive figurines. There are visible connotations linking those items with the equipment of burials of Roman military officials and Barbarian “princely” burials. Still, the purpose of the fittings could not be identified – making part of a parade belt or of an commensurately impressive horse harness are both equally valid possibilities (the latter suggested by the presence of the strap divider [no. 10] and the silver, gilded box phalera [no. 15], probably also included in this set). The form of the *phalera* is reminiscent of Sarmatian box *phalerae* from the 2nd half of the 3rd century. This issue was examined when discussing the function and role of parade belts and horse harnesses in the Roman army.

Precise dating of the analyzed fittings is hindered by the specific nature of a bog deposit (no concentrations of artefacts or anthropogenic stratification of the site), as well as in some part by the destruction of the site by drainage. Additionally there is no precise data on the (possible) phases of the site and on the length of its use (the series of ten carbon-14 dating samples made so far has not produced satisfying results). Also unknown – and sadly will remain so – is the context of discoveries of analogous items in Ukraine. In such circumstances a call was made on artefacts presently providing the best comparative material: the two silver fittings with zoomorphic patterns and buckles from burial III at Wrocław-Zakrzów, and for which the *terminus post quem* is set by an *aureus* of Claudius Gothicus from 268–270, plus the fittings from barrow HG1 at Pielgrzymowo (although one must remember that the dating of the Pielgrzymowo burials is somewhat questionable due to manner in which these had been researched). A fibula of group Almgren VI, a silver buckle close to type M-L H4 and other buckles testify to the Nidajno site being occupied in phase C₂ of the later Roman Period. So far no artefacts with an unquestionably later chronology have been discovered at Nidajno (besides a single item from the Middle Ages). Going by the above, the assemblage of analyzed fittings was dated to phase C₂ of the later Roman Period (from 2nd half of the 3rd to early 4th centuries AD). In turn the time bracket during which the fittings found their way into the *Barbaricum* should be narrowed down to the final three decades of the 3rd century (in light of the potential connection with Barbarian raids on the Pannonian *limes* in the years 270–275).

The original formal and ornamental features of the analyzed assemblage of parade fittings (nos. 1 and 2) led me to distinguish them as a new typological unit – the “Nidajno type”. Furthermore, the unique combination of the internally consistent decorations of the parade artefacts from the bog in the Mazury merits distinction as a separate stylistic phenomena, which I named the “Nidajno Style”. In spite of the present narrow base of sources, its characteristic features may still be distinguished and defined. These include decoration combining zoomorphic motifs in the form of realistic depictions of animals with a geometric pattern of stamps. Zoomorphic motifs prin-

cipally appear as independent depictions placed in the centre of the decorated item, but are also present in the elaborate ornament along the artefacts' edges (bird heads forming the crown of the palmetto or decorating the frames of buckles). Another feature are the friezes consisting of rows of single or repeated semi-circular stamps forming bordiures enclosing a field with the motif or central composition. Such a centrepiece consists of single or group zoomorphic presentations and geometric patterns. Among bordiures a particularly salient type is a relief frieze formed by a row of deep, semi-circular stamps, with arcs facing inward ("postal stamp pattern"). The external bordiure is often emphasized by a parallel internal bordiure, made with smaller, circular or semi-circular stamps and placed inside the gilded band. In the case of more elaborate compositions (like the palmetto fitting from Nidajno) rows of single stamps are used to frame individual component elements. Anatomic details of zoomorphic presentations are additionally emphasized with stamping and engraving or etching, with eyes, ears, and nostrils made with several repeatedly used types of stamps. A particularly distinctive feature of this style is the use of gold, silver, and blackened (with *niello*) surfaces, placed alternatively, juxtaposed to produce a polychromic effect. Figural motifs are presented on a contrasting background – gold on black, black on gold. Arrangement of the above elements makes ornamentation in the Nidajno Style show elegant restraint, even if at times the bordiures accompanying the well displayed centrepieces are build up to the point of baroque opulence. Items made in the Nidajno Style also are of uniform craftsmanship: cast in silver, gilded, and decorated with *niello*. This is confirmed by laboratory analysis of the fittings from Nidajno – cast from homogeneous silver bullion, fire-gilded, engraved and "hot stamped".

The Nidajno Style is closely linked with the military context. It most likely emerged in communities associated with provincial Roman military centres along the Danubian *limes*, probably on the middle or lower Danube. The preserved examples point to it being used principally to decorate military belts and elements of horse tack as well as parts of parade or ceremonial military equipment. The repertoire of the style's identified figural motifs (lions, dolphins, gryphons, hippocampus, birds, fish, deer, palmetto, *aedicula*, *gryllos*) present on examples from Nidajno, Wrocław-Zakrzów (burial III), and Ukraine is consistent and closely linked to the Roman iconographic tradition, particularly apparent in decorations of military equipment. The placement of the *gryllos* motif on an element of a military belt or horse harness – a manner never seen on classical Roman wares, and additionally inside an *aedicula* (an element with sacral connotations) – suggests that the use of such a position had the purpose of giving a new meaning to this image. This strongly hints at the parade assemblage from Nidajno being made to order by a Roman officer (or veteran) of Barbarian origin, with an individual reading of Roman traditions, not necessarily in line with the current canon.

The motif of the *gryllos* in the context of the military styling of 3rd-century Barbarian wares is known only from a few sites, ones located to the north of the middle Danube (Herpály, Osztrópataka-Ostrovany) and in Ukraine (the pair of fibulae from Zhytomyr area and a fashion accessory

with unknown place of discovery). This reinforces the theory that the workshop making elements of equipment in the Nidajno Style was located in the neighbourhood of one of the Roman military centres along the middle Danube – the area which I identify as the place where this style emerged. Such a view is supported by the motif from the fitting from Wrocław-Zakrzów (burial III) bearing an eagle and a deer and associated with Roman military cults with Oriental roots (*vide* the cult of Jupiter Dolichenus). Such cults in the 3rd century were widespread along the Danubian *limes* and in the Balkans.

The gathering of all the features pointed out in the finds from Nidajno, Wrocław-Zakrzów, Pielgrzymowo, and Ukraine yields a unique combination and thereby justifies the decision to distinguish a Nidajno Style. The suggested dating of artefacts representing it stretches from the 2nd half of the 3rd century (most probably its final third) to the first decades of the 4th century. In the relative chronology of the Central European *Barbaricum* this period is correlated with phase C₂ of the Roman Period.

A separate issue is the question of the Nidajno Style's genesis, its relation to the *Römisch-Germanischer Mischhorizont*, plus the possible consequences of this phenomena for the development of new stylistic trends in Roman provincial and Barbarian art. It is worth noting that the combining of lavish stamped ornamentation with partial gilding, *niello*, and zoomorphic patterns appears for the first time on Nidajno Style artefacts. Many stylistic elements also point to the genetic link between Nidajno Style fittings and buckles with later Roman sets of military belts with buckles decorated with animal heads. A similar repertoire of zoomorphic presentations probably indicates a continuity of the symbology of such images in the context of military ideology. However it should be noted that chronologically the Nidajno Style probably falls within the final three decades of the 3rd and the early 4th centuries, whereas the sets of belts mentioned are dated from the final third of the 4th century onward – signifying a gap of at least half a century in their use. An attempt to explain this discrepancy should thus be included in future stylistic studies of elements of late Roman military dress.

In later inter-regional, Germanic decoration styles (Sösdala-Untersiebenbrunn and Nydam) it is possible to observe the continuation and modifications of individual solutions apparent in the parallel preservation of stamped ornamentation and the move away from realism inherent to Nidajno Style zoomorphic presentations. The differences in the manner of depicting animals – the realism of the Nidajno Style versus the gradual geometrization and stylization, with a tendency for *horror vacui* in the Sösdala-Untersiebenbrunn and Nydam styles – may be yet additional pointers to the earlier Nidajno Style being rooted in Roman art, and of its stronger genetic ties with the Roman provincial world than with the Barbarian hinterland. This style's participation in the genesis of Germanic style is also worthy of note.

The artefacts from Nidajno not only are the embodiment of an original artistic concept, but also evidence of long-range contacts of the local population – regardless whether these were brought to

Mazury directly from their place of manufacture or by some other route. The findings concerning the area where the Nidajno Style emerged (the *limes* zone along the middle Danube – possibly the lower Danube, as well – in the late 3rd and early 4th centuries) suggest two alternative paths of these artefacts leading to Bogaczewo Culture. One would be a route leading from the Carpathian Basin northwards (the existence of such an axis of contacts being attested by e.g., the equipment of the lavish burials at Wrocław-Zakrzów), another being a path through the vast expanses occupied by the milieux of Goth cultures in the lands of today's west Ukraine, the Hrubieszów Basin, and east Mazovia (here the pointers being the artefacts from Ukraine, the Goth military organization functioning there, and the fittings from the Wielbark Culture burial at Pielgrzymowo). A less likely route would be one leading from the west and north-west, connecting Nidajno with the Scandinavian Baltic zone, at that time occupied by communities whose elites established long range contacts with the Rhenish and Danubian *limes*. Associations between parade items from Nidajno with the equipment of the elite “princely” burials from Wrocław-Zakrzów and Pielgrzymowo thus favours a southern or south-eastern axis of relations resulting in the appearance of the Nidajno assemblage in Mazury.

It may be assumed that, besides the natural religious connotations, the character of the rituals such as those carried out at Nidajno was connected with a manifestation of the participants' prestige, power, and wealth. Thus it is highly probable that the phenomena of the ritual destruction and sinking of hundreds of valuable items was not without impact on non-sacral aspects of the culture. The social effects of such rituals likely also happened in the Balt milieu. This means that due to the discoveries at Nidajno the previous quite egalitarian image of these societies (based upon features of their funerary rites and lack of clear archaeological evidence for the existence of a military elite) has now been supplemented with testimony of a new phenomena. The interpretation of this new discovery enriches our perceptions of the social structure of communities inhabiting Mazury during the Roman Period and of the forms in which these communities satisfied their religious-cultural needs – or at least how some sections of society did.

This raises the question – could the long range contacts of representatives of Bogaczewo Culture, as attested by the actions undertaken at Lake Nidajno, have later produced the strong ties – visible from the onset of the Migration Period – between the inhabitants of Mazury with Southern and Northern Europe? The theory envisaging such a “distant echo” needs to be verified by further research. The main research objective would be exploration of the outlying, less accessible parts of the former cult site at Nidajno and gathering a larger number of artefacts, as this could settle the issue of Nidajno being a single or multi-phase site. Such efforts should be accompanied by broader exploration on a regional level, possibly leading to the discovery of sites similar to Nidajno (a more detailed exploration of the still-mysterious site at former Wolka-See is also called for), which would allow the mass sinking of weapons and valuable items in Mazury to be regarded as the cultural standard and not some spectacular exception.

The spectacular finds from Nidajno gave an impulse to examine disparate themes and – even if in part – systematize knowledge about the decorative styling of prestigious elements of personal military equipment in the area of Roman-Barbarian contacts in the late 3rd and early 4th centuries. This was a period of crisis for the Roman state, leading to deep going changes in its structural and cultural image. At the same time these changes allowed for the establishment of absolutely new relations between Rome and the *Barbaricum* – one example of evidence for it expressly being the attributes of a Roman officer's authority sunk in a lake in the distant Balt hinterland.

This phenomena should be examined in contexts political (the pressure of Goths upon Roman provinces in the second half of the 3rd century), economic (the constant debasement of coinage), and social (the increasing presence of Barbarians in various aspects of the functioning of the Roman state). Also to be researched is the solidifying Goth military structure, astonishing signs of which are currently being discovered in Ukraine. The order of cause-effect in this mosaic of events may be undecipherable and therefore only hypothesized about. What I present here are only suggestions to be verified in the future.

Future study into areas touched upon in this work should, naturally, aim at verification of the above findings, as well as strive for more precise: dating; identification of additional examples; and narrowing down the areas of manufacture and discoveries of items made in the Nidajno Style. Specifically to include:

Deepened studies into the chronological, spatial, and cultural links between Nidajno Style parade assemblages and the equipment of lavish burials from the Hassleben–Leuna–Zakrzów horizon.

Further comparative studies into the interpretation of zoo- and anthropomorphic motifs on elements of Barbarian military dress and weapons in the Roman Period and on such items from Roman centres in the *limes* zone. The current imbalance of more papers being dedicated to the adoption of Classic Antiquity (Roman, Greek) motifs into Barbarian items should be rectified by illustrating the influence of Barbarians serving in the Roman military upon the appearance of late Roman military dress.

Research into the impact of elements from the sphere of the *sacrum* (of local or Oriental origin) – and dear to the soldiers serving in the *limes* zone – upon the appearance of the Late Roman military dress. And with special focus on provinces along the middle and lower Danube and in the Balkans. This question is linked with potential ties of certain motifs with decoration traditions and symbology of nomadic peoples, Sarmatians in particular.

Continuation of analysis of technology, of the development of gilding techniques and supply of raw materials, as to fully understand the manufacturing side of elements of parade dress of Barbarian elites. In a further perspective it would be worth looking into identification of the impact of these processes on the changing picture of Barbarian material culture.

Identification of the causes and effects of Roman parade fittings finding their way to Mazury (in

the context of relations: Rome versus *Barbaricum*, *Barbaricum* along the *limes* and the Pontic area versus Mazury, the Pontic area versus Germanic area etc.).

One may only hope that at least some of the above will be accomplished through future excavations and exacting laboratory research. The discovery of additional artefacts in well dated archaeological context would be highly desirable, as this would enrich further studies of the complex issue which the Nidajno Style indubitably is.



Plate 1. The assemblage of fittings from Nidajno: a – no. 1; b – no. 2; c – no. 3; d – no. 4; e – no. 5; f – no. 6; g – no. 9; h – no. 10 (Photo Mateusz Osiadacz)



Plate 2. The assemblage of fittings from Nidajno: a – no. 7; b – no. 8 (Photo Mateusz Osiadacz)



Plate 3. Motifs decorating the Nidajno fittings: a – palmetto; b – gryllos; c – aedicula; stretched animal hide and hippocampus; e – dolphin; f – capricorn; g – gryphon; h – gryphon; i – dragon; j–l, n – lion; m – bird (guinea fowl?); o – fish; p – head of a water bird; r – tail of a bird (peacock? Photo Mateusz Osiadacz, edit. Aleksandra Rzeszotarska-Nowakiewicz)

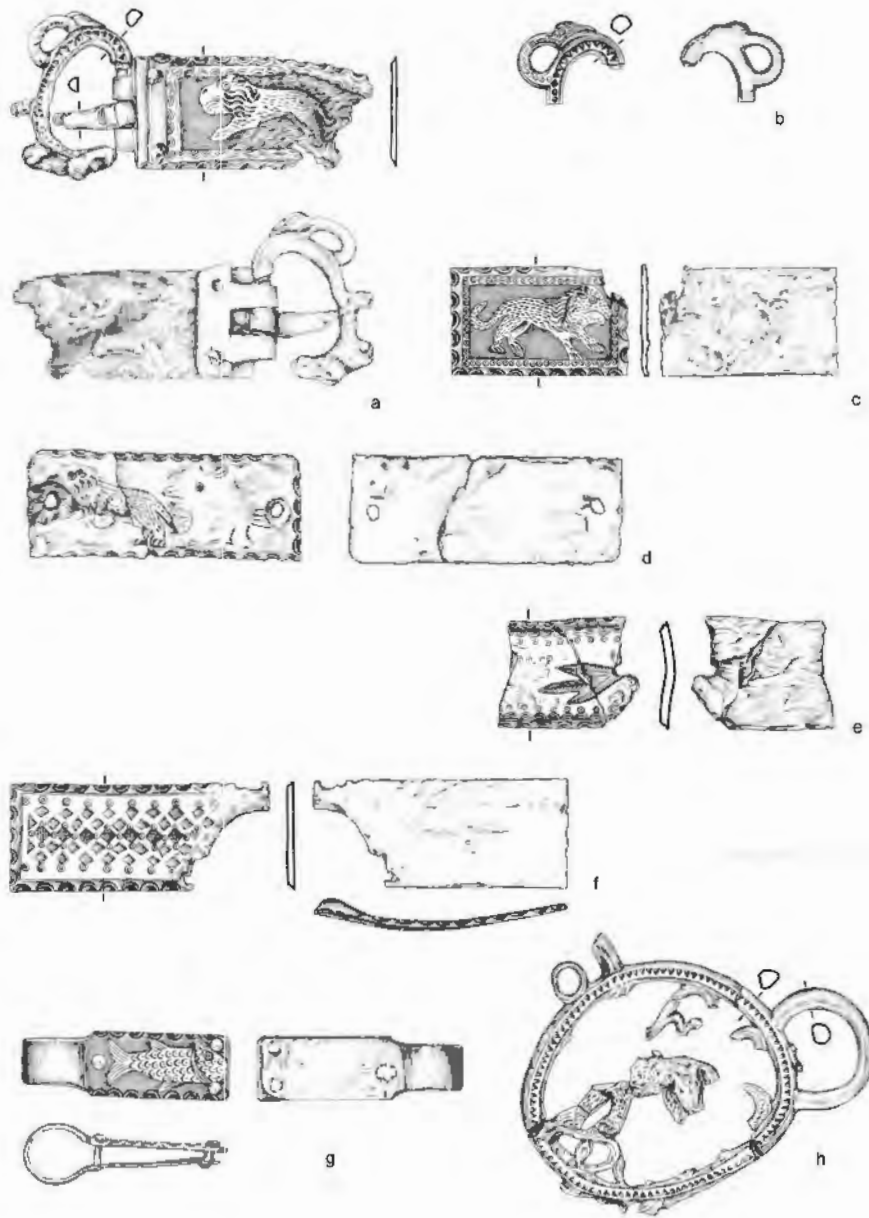


Plate 4. The assemblage of fittings from Nidajno: a – no. 1; b – no. 2; c – no. 3; d – no. 4; e – no. 5; f – no. 6; g – no. 9; h – no. 10 (Drawing Ewa Gumińska)

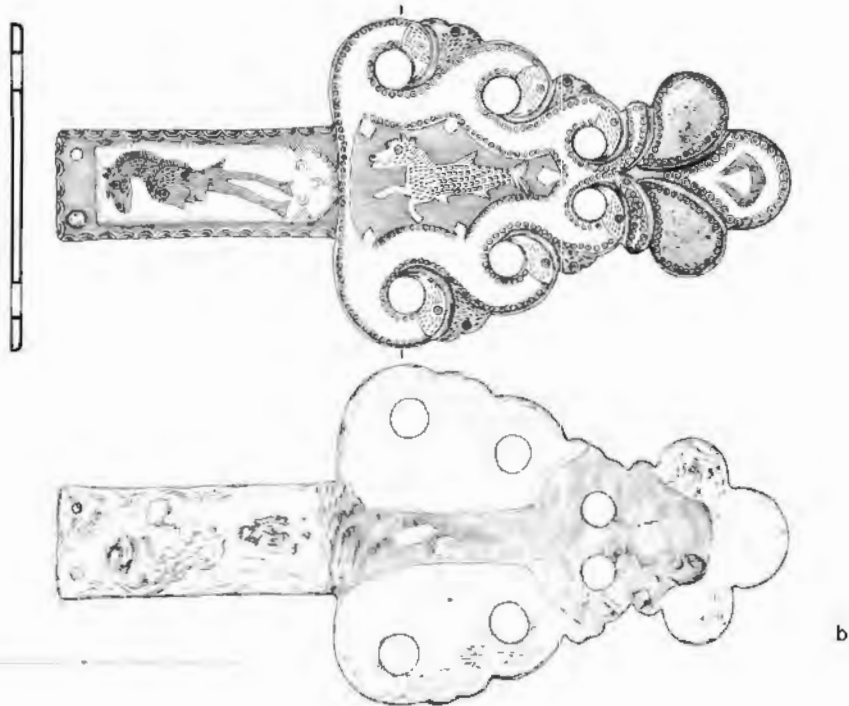
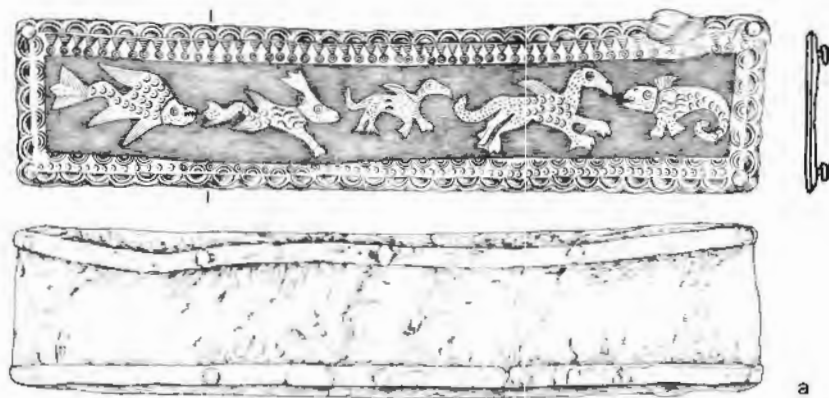


Plate 5. The assemblage of fittings from Nidajno: a – no. 7; b – no. 8 (Drawing Ewa Gumińska)



Plate 6. Gold fittings of: a – sword scabbard neck no. 11; b – sword quillon no. 12
 (Photo Mateusz Osiadacz)

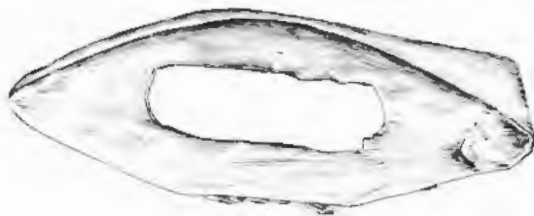


Plate 7. Gold fittings of: a – sword scabbard neck no. 11; b – sword quillon no. 12
(Drawing Ewa Gumińska)

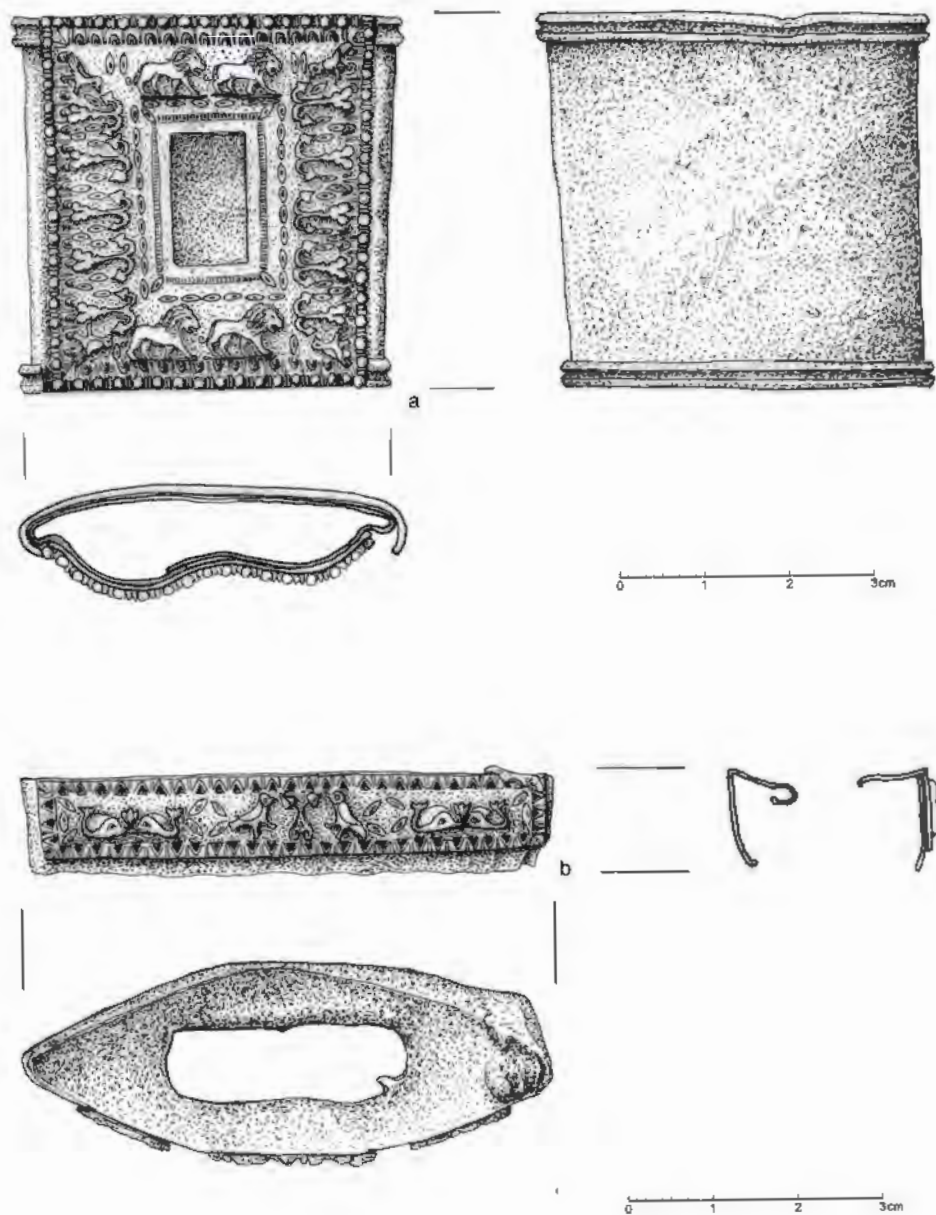


Plate 8. Gold fittings of: a – sword scabbard neck no. 11; b – sword quillon no. 12 (Drawing Bartłomiej Karch)



Plate 9. Silver, gilded figurine of a bird – no. 14 (Photo Mateusz Osiadacz)

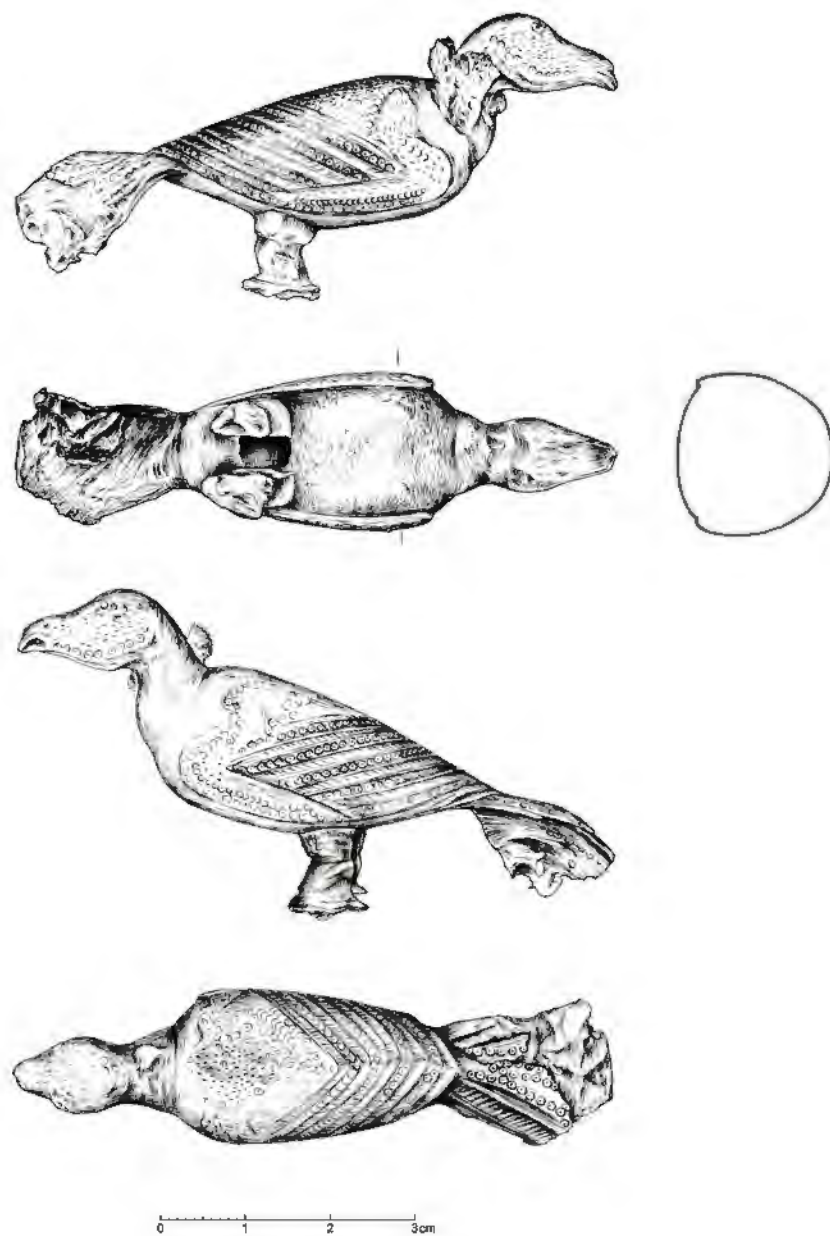


Plate 10. Silver, gilded figurine of bird – no. 14 (Drawing Ewa Gumińska)

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Polish summary

1. Wstęp

Celem prezentowanego opracowania jest próba zdefiniowania istotnej części składowej nowego fenomenu, jaki zarejestrowany został podczas badań wykopaliskowych bagna Nidajno na Pojezierzu Mazurskim (stanowisko Czaszkowo 1, gm. Piecki, pow. mrągowski, woj. warmińsko-mazurskie, N-E Polska). Stanowisko to jest pierwszym w Polsce miejscem, w którym za pomocą współczesnych metod archeologicznych ujawniono ślady praktyk kultowych z okresu wpływów rzymskich, polegających na zatapianiu w bagnie broni i innych prestiżowych elementów osobistego wyposażenia.

Podstawą przeprowadzonych studiów jest seria unikatowych, srebrnych i złożonych ozdób, będących emblematycznym składnikiem inwentarza znalezisk. Ich proveniencja, cechy warsztatowe i stylistyczne w zestawieniu z miejscem ich zdeponowania w starożytności, wskazują nowy rodzaj relacji łączących obszar śródziemnomorskiej kultury klasycznej z odległą (nawet od rzymskiego *limesu*) częścią północnoeuropejskiego *Barbaricum*.

Zastosowana archeologiczna analiza porównawcza, wzbogacona została o niezbędne studia stylistyczno-ikonograficzne, obejmujące większą część europejskiej strefy barbarzyńskiej i bliskich im prowincji rzymskich (głównie naddunajskich i nadreńskich). Pozwoliły one zestawić rzadko wykorzystywane dane z bogatej spuścizny badań nad kulturą materialną i duchową społeczności barbarzyńskich środkowej i północnej Europy z materialnym obrazem armii rzymskiej (ze szczególnym uwzględnieniem komponentu, jaki stanowili w niej żołnierzy pochodzenia barbarzyńskiego). W przeprowadzonej analizie wykorzystane zostały narzędzia z warsztatu badawczego historii sztuki, służące uporządkowanemu opisowi złożonych formalnie i stylistycznie, bogato dekorowanych obiektów o wielowątkowej treści ikonograficznej. W efekcie uzyskano nie tylko inwentaryzacyjny opis przedmiotów, ale również zarejestrowano szereg danych na temat tła kulturowego właściwego dla czasu ich wytworzenia, przenikania motywów i wątków zdobniczych oraz szeroko pojmowanej dyfuzji kulturowej, typowej dla późnej starożytności na obszarze Cesarstwa.

2. Historia rozpoznawania stanowiska

Stanowisko ofiarne w dawnym jeziorze Nidajno było badane wykopaliskowo w latach 2010–2012 przez zespoły badawcze z Wydziału Archeologii Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego oraz Instytutu Archeologii i Etnologii PAN pod kierownictwem Tomasza Nowakiewicza. Wyniki tych prac były już kilkakrotnie prezentowane w literaturze, jednak publikacje te miały charakter wstępnych komunikatów, dotyczyły kwestii metodycznych lub prezentowały rezultaty analiz laboratoryjnych

wybranych zabytków (Nowakiewicz, Rzeszotarska-Nowakiewicz 2012; 2013; 2019; Nowakiewicz 2015; Nowakiewicz red. 2016). Do czasu rozpoczęcia prac terenowych stanowisko nie było znane w literaturze naukowej ani dokumentacji konserwatorskiej. Sytuacja ta zmieniła się w 2010 r. i od tego czasu miejsce to podlega ochronie prawnej.

Pod koniec XIX w. w okolicach dawnego jeziora Nidajno rozpoczęto prace melioracyjne, które z różnym skutkiem kontynuowano w latach 60. i 80. XX w. W efekcie tych prac częściowej destrukcji uległa także peryferyjna część stanowiska (strefa brzegowa dawnego zbiornika). Podczas badań sondażowych w 2010 r. oszacowano skalę tych zniszczeń, ale określono także rodzaj i wartość poznawczą stanowiska, dostrzegając w nim miejsce unikatowe w realiach polskiej archeologii. Badania były kontynuowane w dwóch kolejnych sezonach wykopaliskowych (2011–2012), co pozwoliło m.in. rozpoznać charakter sedimentów i pozyskać serię licznych zbytków, po czym zostały wstrzymane z powodu konieczności opracowania dotychczasowych wyników i uzyskania niezbędnego zaplecza logistyczno-finansowego, potrzebnego do kontynuowania prac w tym miejscu. W 2019 podjęto zakrojone na szeroką skalę nieinwazyjne prace rozpoznawcze (badania geofizyczne metodą magnetyczną i badania georadarowe). Towarzyszyło im (w latach 2019–2020) rozpoznanie lokalnego tła paleoekologicznego z uwzględnieniem czynnika antropopresji (badania sedimentologiczne i palinologiczne). Jednocześnie trwały prace związane z naukowym opracowaniem dotychczasowych wyników, których jednym z efektów jest niniejsza publikacja.

W świetle uzyskanych danych nie ulega wątpliwości, że stanowisko w Nidajnie jest reliktem miejsca kultowego, w którym w starożytności sprawowano ceremonie związane z zatapianiem broni i innych prestiżowych elementów wyposażenia wojowników. Depozyty tych przedmiotów – dotychczas odkryte w liczbie ponad 300 znalezisk – świadczą o praktykowaniu przez Bałtów (w tym wypadku ludność kultury bogaczewskiej) w okresie wpływów rzymskich zwyczaju ceremonialnego składania w środowisku wodnym cennych dóbr (uprzednio intencjonalnie niszczone) o wyraźnym militarnym charakterze. Wszystkie zarejestrowane cechy wyraźnie zbliżają stanowisko w Nidajnie do modelu znanego z północnoeuropejskiego *Barbaricum*, widocznego w jutlandzkich bagnach ofiarnych takich jak m.in. Illerup-Ådal, Nydam, Thorsberg, Vimose, Ejsbøl, Porskjær i inne. Widoczne różnice (np. brak szczątków zwierzęcych) mogą wynikać z wciąż inicjalnego stanu rozpoznania stanowiska w Nidajnie lub być oryginalną cechą regionalną. Wyjaśnienie tej i szeregu innych kwestii problemowych możliwe będzie po kolejnych sezonach badawczych.

3. Podstawa materiałowa

Kategorią najliczniej reprezentowaną w inwentarzu znalezisk z Nidajna jest zestaw militariów, wśród których przeważają żelazne groty broni drzewcowej. Obecne są także fragmenty głowni dwusiecznych mieczy (w tym egzemplarzy dziwerowanych), brązowy trzewik pochwy miecza, 20

fragmentów kolczugi różnej wielkości, 15 fragmentów noży, 5 fragmentów umb, fragment topora, 2 fragmenty żelaznych ostróg i 3 fragmenty wędzideł. Elementy wyposażenia osobistego są stosunkowo nieliczne: 11 sprzączek, 5 brązowych zapinek, 20 ich fragmentów, 4 zawieszki wiaderkowate, 3 zawieszki z trójkątnym dnem, fragment grzebienia, fragment kamiennej osetki wraz z zestawem drobnych, trudnych do identyfikacji destruktywów.

Na tym tle wyróżnia się grupa ponadstandardowo cennych i prestiżowych przedmiotów: 9 bogato zdobionych, srebrnych, złożonych i czernionych za pomocą niello okuć, srebrny, ażurowy rozdzielacz rzemieni, fragment srebrnej falery pudełkowej, złote okucie jelca i szyjki pochwy miecza, paciory mieczowy, srebrna, złożona figurka ptaka i 2 fragmenty szklanego naczynia syryjskiej proveniencji (co potwierdziły wyniki badań laboratoryjnych).

Podstawą prezentowanych studiów jest seria srebrnych, złożonych okuć zdobionych *niello*: sprzączka ze skuwką z wyobrażeniem lwa i ptaków (nr 1), fragment analogicznej sprzączki z ramą zdobioną ptasią głową (nr 2), prostokątne okucia z wizerunkami: lwa (nr 3), lwa i ptaka (nr 4) oraz ptaka (nr 5 – przedmiot zachowany fragmentarycznie), prostokątne okucie z wzorem geometrycznym (nr 6), duże prostokątne okucie z wyobrażeniami delfina, koziorożca, dwóch gryfów i smoka (nr 7), duże palmetowe okucie z dwiema mitycznymi bestiami i ptasimi głowami (nr 8), prostokątne okucie-przywieszka z rybą (nr 9) i srebrny, ażurowy rozdzielacz rzemieni (nr 10). Przedmioty te cechuje wyraźna spójność: formalna, surowcowa (jednorodne kruszce o wysokich próbach) i warsztatowa (jednakowe cechy technologiczne: odlewanie, stemplowanie, rycie, złożenia, zdobienie niello). Pozwala to widzieć w nich bazowy zestaw referencyjny do dalszych badań. Nie pominięto w nich także pozostałych przedmiotów z grupy elitarnych znalezisk: srebrna, złożona falera pudełkowa (nr 15) została uwzględniona w analizie funkcji użytkowej całego zestawu, zaś okazałe, ale pozbawione wspólnych cech stylistycznych z wydzielonym wyżej zbiorem złote okucia szyjki pochwy miecza (nr 11) i jelca miecza (nr 12) oraz srebrną, złożoną figurkę ptaka (nr 14) i srebrną sprzączkę (nr 16) potraktowano jako materiał pomocniczy w dalszych dociekaniach.

W generalnym ujęciu zestaw ozdób z Nidajna definiują następujące cechy: kosztowne surowce użyte do ich wykonania (złoto i srebro o najwyższej próbie; por. Nowakiewicz red. 2016); liczba przedmiotów (wieloelementowy komplet stylistycznie spójnych zdobień); zaawansowane techniki wykonania (amalgamaty, techniki lutowania i złocenia, niello, liczba stempli; por. Nowakiewicz red. 2016 r.); rozbudowany, niekonwencjonalny i wyrafinowany zestaw motywów figuralnych, odwołujący się do wątków głęboko osadzonych w heterogenicznej tradycji Cesarstwa; towarzyszące przedmiotom stylistycznie spójnym dodatkowe elementy prestiżowe (złote okucia paradnego miecza, paciory mieczowy, figurka sępa, szklany puchar z syryjskich warsztatów), podkreślające insygnialny charakter zestawu.

4. Analiza stylistyczna

Podstawowym narzędziem analitycznym była archeologiczna analiza porównawcza, wzbogacona elementem studiów stylistyczno-ikonograficznych. Omówione zostały technologiczne i warsztatowe cechy stylistyczne okuć. Można do nich zaliczyć nie tylko 15 typów stempli, za pomocą których wykonano dekorację okuć (m.in. w strefie ozdobnych bordiur czy elementów przedstawień figuralnych), ale także operowanie w obrębie powierzchni metalowych przedmiotów efektem wielobarwności, uzyskiwanym przez zestawienie płaszczyzn w kolorze srebrnym, złotym i czarnym.

Jako najbliższe analogie stylistyczne do analizowanych zabytków wskazano okucia pasów z grobów „książęcych” z północnego *Barbaricum* (Wrocław-Zakrzów [Breslau-Sackrau], grób 3 i Pielgrzymowo [Pilgramsdorf], kurhan HG1) oraz znaleziska bez znanego kontekstu archeologicznego z obszaru Ukrainy. Inspiracji stylistycznych dla nidajnowskich okuć, przeprowadzone obserwacje pozwoliły natomiast upatrywać w srebrnych, złożonych i zdobionych niello okuciach pasów oficerskich i pochew mieczy z obszarów Cesarstwa Rzymskiego, datowanych na schyłek III w. po Chr.

5. Analiza ikonograficzna

Zdobienia figuralne zestawu okuć z Nidajna stały się podstawą do analizy ikonograficznej zabytków z wyobrażeniami antropo- i zoomorficznymi: okucia palmetowego z dwiema hybrydami i ptakami (nr 8), okucia z pięcioma bestiami (nr 7) oraz sprzączek i okuć z wizerunkami zwierząt (nr 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 9). Pozostają one w różnego rodzaju relacjach z materiałami z europejskiego *Barbaricum* i Cesarstwa Rzymskiego (przede wszystkim jego prowincji nadreńskich i naddunajskich), choć zasadniczo widoczne są silne konotacje łączące je z szeroko pojmowanym nadlimesowym środowiskiem militarnym.

Efektywność podjętych działań uwidoczniła się w najpełniejszym stopniu w przypadku najbardziej złożonego spośród analizowanych zabytków, tzn. palmetowego okucia nr 8. W kompozycji przedmiotu wyróżniono trzy strefy: pierwsza zawiera motyw korony palmetu utworzonej przez pary ptasich głów, drugą – na środku – wyznacza motyw rozpostartej skóry zwierzęcej i umieszczonego na niej hippokampa, treścią trzeciej jest zaś końsko-ludzka hybryda (*gryllos*) wraz z motywem *aedicula* (nisza świątynna) i towarzyszącym im wątkiem lunarnym.

W analizie ikonograficznej treści tego okucia wykorzystano rzymskie blachy wotywnie w formie palmetu lub drzewa z przedstawieniami bóstw w *aedicula*. Pomocne okazały się także inne tematyczne i stylistyczne paralele: trójlistne zawieszki rzymskiego rzędu końskiego, metalowe naczynia typu Eggers 121, ceremonialne tarcze, miniaturowych zawieszki i okucia w formie tarczy zachowujące kształt zwierzęcej skóry, a także paradne naczółki końskie powielające ten kształt (często w uproszczonej i zgeometryzowanej formie). Specjalne znaczenie w tym kontekście mają

– również wykorzystane w analizie – przedstawienia skór zwierzęcych na freskach i *crustulum* (formach do wypieków), mających związek z walkami gladiatorów. Przedstawione rozważania zostały zilustrowane również zestawem odpowiednich danych etnograficznych, związanych z symboliką motywu zwierzęcej skóry: tarcz wojowników Intore (Rwanda), tarcz i amuletów Tuaregów, sztuki Indian północnoamerykańskich i ludu Afshar (Iran).

Dzięki analizie motywu *gryllosa* dostrzeżono zbliżone ujęcia takiej postaci na przedmiotach proveniencji rzymskiej (m.in. na wotywnych posążkach Marsa i Jowisza w hełmach typu korynckiego), barbarzyńskiej, ale także na przedstawieniach sasanidzkich władców. Współwystępujący z nim motyw *aedicula* występuje dość powszechnie na rzymskich blachach wotywnych i elementach paradnego uzbrojenia ochronnego, zaś przy interpretacji trzech trójkątnych stempli zwieńczonych półksiężycami (umieszczonych pod łukiem *aedicula*), pomocne okazały się detale z rzymskich stel oraz wizerunki świętej góry Argaios w Kapadocji (widoczne na monetach bitych w Cezarei Kapadockiej; podobny motyw obecny jest w mennictwie indyjskich Zachodnich Satrapów).

Analiza motywu gonitwy zwierząt (okucie nr 7) ujawniła szereg podobieństw łączących dekorowany nim zabytek do hellenistycznych i rzymskich faler, okuć pasów, pochew mieczy i elementów rzędu końskiego, a także wytwarzanych w prowincjonalnorzymskich warsztatach wiader typu Hemmoor. Motyw smoka został zestawiony z militarnymi przedstawieniami rzymskiego *draco*, a wizerunki lwów (okucia nr 1, 3, 4), gęsich lub łabędzich głów (ramy sprzączek nr 1, 2) i ryby (okucie nr 9) ukazano w kontekście zdobnictwa okuć rzymskich pasów wojskowych, metalowych naczyń, tabliczek i steli wotywnych. Zastosowanie szerokiego tła porównawczego pozwoliło także zinterpretować fragmentarycznie zachowane zdobienia poważnie uszkodzonych okuć jako wyobrażenia perlicy i pawia (odpowiednio nr 4 i 5).

Analiza ikonograficzna paradnych znalezisk z Nidajna pozwoliła wskazać obecne wśród nich elementy rzymskiej tradycji zdobniczej (stylistyki i ikonografii), potwierdzając ich ścisły związek z kanonem sztuki rzymskiej (co koresponduje z wynikami badań laboratoryjnych, wskazującymi, że do wykonania tych ozdób użyto jednorodnego i wysokogatunkowego surowca). Elementami tymi są: palmeta („drzewo życia”), *gryllos*, *aedicula*, elementy astralne, rozciągnięta skóra zwierzęca, hippokamp, motyw gonitwy zwierząt (rzeczywistych i mitycznych) oraz wzory zoomorficzne (lwy, ptaki i ryby).

Pod względem ikonograficznym wzory z Nidajna widoczne są w sztuce rzymskiej głównie w dekoracji elementów uzbrojenia i niektórych przedmiotów użytkowych. Dotyczy to czterech głównych kategorii znalezisk: 1. elementów osobistego wyposażenia i uzbrojenia (części pasów wojskowych, rzędu końskiego i paradnego uzbrojenia ochronnego, takich jak hełmy, nagolenniki i końskie naczółki); 2. niektórych przedmiotów związanych ze sferą wierzeń (zarówno z kultami militarnymi, jak i cywilnymi, takimi jak blachy i tabliczki wotywno oraz posążki); 3. niektórych typów naczyń należących do wystawnej, metalowej zastawy stołowej (półmiski typu Eggers 121 i wiadra typu Hemmoor); 4. gemm mających znaczenie magiczne (apotropaiczne).

Dostrzegalny jest także związek poszczególnych motywów z kategoriami zdobionych przez nie przedmiotów. Przykładem takich relacji może być związek gonitwy zwierząt z militariami (przyczyn motyw ten wywodzący się z nadczarnomorskiej tradycji hellenistycznej i trackiej występuje na rzymskim osobistym wyposażeniu militarnym już od I w. po Chr., na co wskazują okucia *cingulae* typu B.4.a wg Hoss i pochew gladiusów). Równie widoczny jest relacja łącząca z militariami motyw rozciągniętej skóry zwierzęcej również (dotyczy tarcz, okuć wojskowych pasów, pancerzy i naczółków końskich; pośrednio można z tym łączyć kontekst walk gladiatorских, np. freski z amfiteatru i *crustulum* z *Viminacium*, a może także zawieszki-amulety w tym kształcie). W najbardziej wyraźny sposób związek ten łączy motywu palmetę (palmowego liścia) z wotywnymi srebrnymi i złotymi blachami z III w., znajduwanymi wzdłuż rzymskiego *limesu*.

Cechą charakterystyczną zestawu okuć z Nidajna jest bogactwo zastosowanych motywów i ich twórcze połączenie na elementach osobistego wyposażenia (pasa lub rzędu końskiego). Świadczy to o inwencji artystycznej i wyobraźni twórcy, ale zapewne jest także świadectwem i nośnikiem głębszej idei. Wizerunki zdobiące analizowany zestaw nie były prostą kombinacją wzorów zaczerpniętych z katalogu ornamentacyjnych kanonów ale, zapewne, zostały zestawione zgodnie z preferencją odbiorcy i przyszłego użytkownika tych przedmiotów (eksperymentowanie z formą lub treścią ornamentów tej klasy przedmiotów wydaje się mało prawdopodobne). Przedstawienia zoomorficzne wydają się być częścią bardziej złożonej narracji – na obecnym etapie badań wciąż dość hermetycznej. Ta interpretacyjna wielopoziomowość dotyczy również przedstawienia antropomorficznego – *gryllosa* – w oryginalny i unikatowy sposób umieszczonego w *aedicula*, tzn. w miejscu, w którym zazwyczaj umieszczano przedstawienie bóstwa lub herosa.

Pomimo niekompletności i fragmentaryzacji zestawu można uznać, że dominujący wpływ na tematykę (a przez to symbolikę) zdobień z Nidajna miała dekoracja elitarnego, rzymskiego wyposażenia militarnego, łącznie z wizerunkami z przedstawień kultowych znajdujących w rzymskich ośrodkach wojskowych i w ich otoczeniu nad reńsko-dunajskim *limesem*. Świadczy o tym zestawienie motywu gonitwy zwierząt, wybór „gatunkowy” tych stworzeń (lwy, ptaki, ryba, delfin, koziorożec, hippokamp i gryfy), sposób przedstawienia smoka na wzór rzymskiego *draco* i motyw rozciągniętej skóry zwierzęcej, ściśle nawiązujące do kanonu zdobień paradnego uzbrojenia (obejmującego także strój i wyposażenie żołnierza – i widocznego głównie w dekoracji oficerskich pasów – i rząd koński jego wierzchowca) oraz do form i symboliki rzymskich znaków wojskowych.

Umieściwszy analizę palmetowego okucia w kontekście rzymskich praktyk religijnych, można dotrzeć silne konotacje łączące formę zabytku z kultowymi blachami wotywnymi w kształcie palmetę lub liścia palmowego. Umieszczenie *gryllosa* w *aedicula* i kompozycja towarzyszących mu elementów sugerują, że *gryllos* jest w tym układzie składnikiem nie równoważnym wobec pozostałych, ale wobec nich nadrzędnym – któremu podporządkowane są pozostałe: korona „drzewa życia” z ptakami (element niebiański?) i hippokamp na skórze zabitego zwierzęcia (element chthoniczny?). Szczególne znaczenie *gryllosa* zostało dodatkowo podkreślone motywem astralnym,

sugerującym jego boski status, co pozwala przypuszczać, że przedstawia on bóstwo prymarne wobec innych obszarów, symbolizowanych przez pozostałe wizerunki z zestawu. Interpretację taką wzmacniać może zestawienie treści ikonograficznej z formą przedmiotu: niezależnie od jego funkcji (prawdopodobnie naczółek z końskiego ogłowa, albo występująca w innym miejscu zawieszka), *gryllos* ustawiony jest we właściwej pozycji, w odróżnieniu od hippokampa, korony drzewa i ptaków. Warto także zauważyć, że w zdublowanym wątku końskim w palmecie można doszukiwać się związku z wizerunkami „jeźdźców dunajskich” i „trackiego jeźdźca”, znanymi z tabliczek wotywnych i stel nagrobnych (którym także towarzyszą liczne wzory zoomorficzne, w tym motyw gonitwy zwierząt). Nagromadzenie wskazanych elementów mogło służyć wzmocnieniu funkcji apotropaicznej przedmiotu.

Jednym z celów podjętych studiów ikonograficznych było zebranie danych na temat źródeł potencjalnych inspiracji dla wzorów zdobiących zabytki z Nidajna. Przeprowadzona analiza wskazała, że kombinacja wskazanych wyżej elementów mogła z największym prawdopodobieństwem zająć w III w. w prowincjach nad środkowym Dunajem, z szczególnym wskazaniem na obszary Dacji, Mezji i Panonii. Cechy ikonograficzne i stylistyczne zestawu wskazują ponadto na warsztat złotniczy funkcjonujący w otoczeniu nadlimesowego ośrodka militarnego. Nie przeczą temu cechy kompozycyjne korony palmy i gonitwy zwierząt sugerujące, że twórca zestawu (lub jego projektant) dodatkowe inspiracje zaczerpnął z motywów zdobiących metalowe naczynia (półmiski typu Eggers 121) i wiadra typu Hemmoor. Przedmioty te produkowano głównie w 1 poł. III w. w galijskich i nadreńskich warsztatach prowincjonalnorzymskich, jednak nad środkowym Dunajem pojawiły się one w większej liczbie wraz z relokacjami rzymskich jednostek wojskowych z prowincji nadreńskich w poł. III w. Z trudnym do oszacowania stopniem prawdopodobieństwa można zatem przyjąć, że zestaw przedmiotów z Nidajna – o silnie zaznaczonej symbolice militarnej, niewolnej także od aspektów sakralnych (legionowe kultury militarne) – został wykonany na zamówienie oficera rzymskiej armii (może weterana?) – zapewne *auxilii* stacjonującej nad środkowym Dunajem. Wyraźny motyw „koński” na palmecie oraz funkcjonalna identyfikacja szeregu innych prestiżowych przedmiotów (rozdzielacz rzemieni, elementy ogłowa?, srebrna sprzączka i srebrzona ostroga) pozwalają przypuszczać, że ich właściciel był oficerem jazdy.

Ornamentyka właściwa dla zestawu z Nidajna musiała trafiać w gusta barbarzyńców, mających kontakt z obszarami prowincjonalnorzymskimi (czego dowodzą m.in. dwa okucia wykonane w tym samym stylu z Wrocławia-Zakrzowa, grób III). Różne motywy figuralne (szczególnie zoomorficzne) zostały zaadoptowane przez rzemieślników barbarzyńskich około poł. III w. i stały się atrakcyjnym sposobem wyrażania treści wykraczających poza zwykłe funkcje ozdobne. Z takim zjawiskiem należy łączyć np. dekorację okładzin umbra z Herpaly, blachy z Ostrovan czy tarczki i blachę z Thorsberg, których motywy figuralne są inspirowane wyrobami prowincjonalnorzymskimi z czasów Cesarstwa. Przedmioty te z pewnością identyfikowały wysoki status posiadacza, a zapewne także ponadregionalny zakres jego wpływów i kontaktów, jednak należy zaznaczyć,

że choć pod względem ikonograficznym są one bliskie okuciom z Nidajna, to jednak dzielą je zbyt duże różnice stylistyczne i warsztatowe, aby można je było rozpatrywać w ramach jednego zjawiska. Cechy nidajnowskiego zestawu zdecydowanie umieszczają go bowiem wśród wyrobów warsztatów prowincjonalnorzymskich, a nie ich barbarzyńskich naśladownictw.

Zestaw z Nidajna jest ilustracją zjawiska, będącego częścią większego i bardziej złożonego procesu. Zdobiące go wzory i motywy nie były nieznane w *Barbaricum*: nie tylko je zaadoptowano naśladowując ich formę, ale zaczęto je też przetwarzać, zaspokajając potrzeby osób o wysokiej pozycji społecznej, statusie ekonomicznym i randze militarnej. Upodobania przedstawicieli tych elity odegrały kluczową rolę w upowszechnianiu sztuki figuratywnej w środowiskach barbarzyńskich. Prawdopodobnie przynajmniej w niektórych przypadkach w barbarzyńskich warsztatach stosowano oryginalne rzymskie narzędzia, a niekiedy w produkcji zapewne uczestniczyli także rzymscy rzemieślnicy, co dodatkowo wpływało na zróżnicowanie i zindywidualizowanie wzorów i motywów, obecnych w różnych przykładach barbarzyńskiej sztuki naśladowczej. Generalnie jednak, rzymska koncepcja sposobu przedstawiania wizerunków zwierząt w późnej starożytności nie wydawała się być zbyt odległa od koncepcji germańskich. Wpływ na to z pewnością miało wzajemne przenikanie się dwóch światów – coraz bardziej intensywne w kolejnych dziesięcioleciach III, IV i V w. W efekcie, u schyłku Cesarstwa rzymski przekaz ikonograficzny czytelny był i dla Germanów – zarówno tych spoza *limesu*, jak i będących od pokoleń obywatelami rzymskimi. Jakkolwiek w efekcie zmieniających się okoliczności ewoluowała także rzymska ikonografia, to jednak nie ograniczyło to stosowania wciąż zrozumiałej (także w konwencji symbolicznej) ornamentyki zoomorficznej. Dzięki temu, motywy te wciąż trwały, choć w ich treści semantycznej archaiczna idea mocy zwierzęcych zastąpiły nowe kulturowe i religijne konteksty.

6. Analiza wydzielonych zabytków towarzyszących

Wyniki analizy zabytków towarzyszących pozwoliły ocenić spojrzeć na spójny stylistycznie zestaw z innej perspektywy. Przede wszystkim potwierdzają one najwyższą prestiżową rangę tego zbioru, ale także dostarczają ikonograficznych i stylistycznych podobieństw (w ślad za potwierdzoną już wcześniej surowcową jednorodnością), pozwalających widzieć w nich elementy jednego dużego, zdeponowanego w Nidajnie kompletu przedmiotów. Na zabytkach tych zidentyfikowano szereg wzorów zoomorficznych: na złotym okuciu szyjki pochwy miecza (nr 11) dwie pary lwów i cztery ptaki, a na (tworzącym z okuciem szyjki komplet) złotym okuciu jelca miecza (nr 12) parę ptaków i dwie pary delfinów. Pełnoplastyczną figurkę ptaka (nr 14) zinterpretowano jako przedstawienie ptaka drapieżnego, prawdopodobnie sępa lub orła, pełniącego rolę *signum* (figurka przystosowana była do umieszczenia na tulei) i nawiązujące do rzymskich *aquila* lub występujących w podobnej formie wotywnych figurek świątynnych. Dostrzegalne są konotacje łączące te przedmioty z wyposażeniem grobów rzymskich urzędników wojskowych oraz z barbarzyńskich grobów „książęcych”

7. Użytkowa funkcja okuć z Nidajna

Podjmując próbę wskazania funkcji użytkowej analizowanych okuć, przedstawiono alternatywną interpretację całego zestawu, będącego częścią paradnego pasa lub równie dekoracyjnego rzędu końskiego (co sugeruje obecność ażurowego rozdzielacza rzemieni i srebrnej, złoczonej falery pudełkowej, prawdopodobnie będących częścią tego kompletu). Falera nawiązuje formą do sarmackich faler pudełkowych z drugiej poł. III w. Zagadnienie to zostało przedstawione na tle rozważań o funkcji i roli paradnego pasa wojskowego i rzędu końskiego w armii rzymskiej.

8. Chronologia znalezisk z Nidajna

Precyzyjne datowanie analizowanych okuć jest utrudnione ze względu na specyfikę bagienego depozytu (brak zwartych zespołów zabytków i antropogenicznej stratyfikacji stanowiska), a w pewnym stopniu także z powodu zniszczeń stanowiska poczynionych podczas melioracji, i niejasności na temat jego fazowości i czasu funkcjonowania (seria wykonanych dotychczas 10 datowań metodą radiowęglową nie przyniosła satysfakcjonujących wyników w tej kwestii). Nieznany jest także (i niestety takim pozostanie) kontekst odkrycia analogicznych egzemplarzy z Ukrainy. W tej sytuacji do ustalenia chronologii względnej posłużono się datownikami pośrednimi: dwoma srebrnymi okuciami z wzorami zoomorficznymi i sprzączkami z grobu III z Wrocławia-Zakrzowa (Breslau-Sackrau), dla których *terminus post quem* wyznacza aureus Klaudiusza Gockiego z lat 268–270) oraz okuciami z kurhanu HG 1 z Pielgrzymowa (Pilgramsdorf). Datowanie tych pochówków jest obarczone zastrzeżeniami wynikającymi z historii badań, jednak pomimo tego stanowią one obecnie najlepszy materiał porównawczy. Zapinki grupy Almgren VI, srebrna sprzączka zbliżona do typu M-L H4 wraz z pozostałymi sprzączkami potwierdzają funkcjonowanie stanowiska w Nidajnie w fazie C₂ młodszego okresu rzymskiego. Jednocześnie dotychczas nie odkryto w tym miejscu zabytków o niepodważalnie późniejszej chronologii (nie licząc jednego okazu o średniowiecznej metryce). Na tej podstawie zestaw analizowanych okuć został wydатовany na fazę C₂ młodszego okresu rzymskiego (2 poł. III w. po Chr.). Wydaje się przy tym właściwe zawężenie przedziału czasowego, w którym okucia trafiły na tereny barbarzyńskie, do ostatnich trzech dekad III w. po Chr. (co uzasadniają potencjalne związki z najezdami barbarzyńskimi na *limes* panoński w latach 270–275).

Oryginalne cechy formalne i ornamentacyjne sprzączek należących do paradnego zestawu analizowanych okuć (nr 1, 2), skłoniły do wydzielenia ich jako nowej jednostki typologicznej pod nazwą *typ Nidajno*.

9. Styl Nidajno jako zjawisko kulturowe i artystyczne. Definicja stylu

Unikatowa kombinacja zdobień paradnego zestawu z Nidajna i ich zauważalna wewnętrzna spójność sprawia, że można w nich dostrzec wyraźnie odrębny fenomen stylistyczny, nazwany *stylem Nidajno*. Pomimo dość wąskiej obecnie bazy źródłowej można wyróżnić i zdefiniować jego autonomiczne cechy charakterystyczne:

1. Kompozycja zdobień łączy motywy zoomorficzne w postaci naturalistycznych wizerunków zwierząt z geometrycznymi układami stempli. Motywy zoomorficzne występują przede wszystkim w postaci odrębnych i umieszczonych w centrum dekorowanego przedmiotu przedstawień, ale są także obecne wśród elementów rozbudowanej ornamentyki umieszczonej na jego krawędziach (ptasie główki tworzące koronę palmety i zdobiące ramy sprzączek).
2. Fryzy złożone z rzędów pojedynczych lub złożonych półkolistych stempli tworzą bordiury wzdłuż krawędzi przedmiotów i zamykają pole z motywem lub kompozycją centralną, którą stanowią samodzielne lub złożone przedstawienia zoomorficzne i układy geometryczne. Wśród bordiur szczególnie charakterystyczny jest reliefowy fryz, utworzony z rzędu głębokich, półkolistych stempli, zwróconych łukiem do wewnątrz („ornament znaczka pocztowego”). W rozbudowanej wersji pojawiają się podwójne i potrójne półkoliste stemple skierowane łukami na zewnątrz. Zewnętrzne bordiury często są podkreślone równoległą bordiurą wewnętrzną, wykonaną z mniejszych, kolistych lub półkolistych stempli, umieszczonych na pasie złocenia. W przypadku rozbudowanych kompozycji (np. palmetowego okucia z Nidajna) rzędy pojedynczych stempli stanowią obramowanie jej elementów składowych.
3. Cechy charakterystyczne przedstawień zoomorficznych (np. sierść, włosy, pyski, zęby, łuski i pęty zwierząt) są dodatkowo podkreślone stemplowaniem i grawerowaniem: oczy, uszy, nozdrza są zaznaczone przy pomocy kilku powtarzających się rodzajów stempli.
4. Szczególnie charakterystyczny dla tego stylu jest skontrastowanie złotych, srebrnych i czernionych (za pomocą niello) powierzchni, umieszczonych naprzemiennie i zestawionych ze sobą w sposób, pozwalający uzyskać efekt polichromii. Motywy figuralne umieszczone są na kontrastowym tle: złote na czarnym i czarne na tle złotym.
5. Kompozycja wskazanych wyżej elementów w mniej lub bardziej rozbudowane układy sprawia, że ornamentyka stylu Nidajno charakteryzuje się elegancką wstrzeźliwością w ukazaniu dobrze wyeksponowanego motywu głównego, czemu towarzyszą bordiury, rozbudowane niekiedy z barokowym przepychem.
6. Elementy wykonane w stylu Nidajno wykazują spójność warsztatową: są odlewane ze srebra, złoczone i zdobione niello. Dowodzą tego wyniki badań laboratoryjnych okuć z Nidajna, odlewa-

nych z jednorodnego kruszcu srebrnego, złożonych ogniowo, cyzelowanych i stemplowanych „na gorąco”. Zdobienie niello na większych powierzchniach wykonano przy użyciu półpłynnej pasty; drobne elementy kompozycji (trójkątne wkładki niello na krawędziach) umieszczone w postaci stałej, ciętej na fragmenty dopasowane kształtem do wybitych uprzednio gniazd.

7. Styl Nidajno jest mocno związany z kontekstem militarnym. Wykształcił się on najpewniej w środowiskach związanych z prowincjonalnorzymskimi ośrodkami wojskowymi nad dunajskim *limesem*, prawdopodobnie nad środkowym lub dolnym Dunajem. Zachowane przykłady świadczą, że był on stosowany przede wszystkim w zdobieniu wojskowych pasów i rzędu końskiego oraz elementów paradnego lub ceremonialnego uzbrojenia.
8. Repertuar rozpoznanych motywów figuralnych tego stylu (lwy, delfiny, gryfy, hippokamp, ptaki, ryba, jeleniowate, palmeta, motyw *aedicula*, gryllos) obecnych na egzemplarzach z Nidajna, Wrocławia-Zakrzowa (grób III) i z Ukrainy jest genetycznie spójny i ma ścisły związek z rzymską tradycją ikonograficzną, szczególnie widoczną w zdobieniu militarnego wyposażenia.
9. Umieszczenie motywu *gryllosa* na elemencie wojskowego pasa lub rzędu końskiego, czyli w relacji niewystępującej w klasycznych wyrobach rzymskich (gdzie postać ta pojawia się przede wszystkim na *gemmach*), w dodatku wewnątrz *aedicula* (elementu mającego w świecie rzymskim konotacje sakralne) sugeruje, że zabieg ten służył nadaniu wizerunkowi *gryllosa* nowego znaczenia – przynajmniej w percepcji posiadacza tego pasa lub rzędu. Obserwacja ta stanowi mocną przesłankę, że paradny komplet z Nidajna został wykonany na zamówienie rzymskiego oficera (lub weterana) barbarzyńskiego pochodzenia – zapewne Germanina – inaczej odczytującego spuściznę rzymskiej tradycji. Domniemanie to wzmacnia zestawienie gryllosa z Nidajna z przedstawieniami tego stworzenia z okładziny umba z Herpály i siodła z Ostrovan, będącymi podobnymi świadectwami adaptacji tego motywu w świecie germańskim.
10. Występowanie motywu gryllosa w kontekście militarnej stylistyki wyrobów barbarzyńskich z III w. ogranicza się do kilku znalezisk występujących na północ od środkowego Dunaju (Herpály, Ostrovany-Osztrópataka) i Ukrainy (para zapinek z okolic Żytomierza oraz aplikacja bez danych na temat lokalizacji miejsca znalezienia). Wzmacnia to tezę, że pierwotny warsztat produkujący elementy wyposażenia w stylu Nidajno znajdował się w otoczeniu rzymskich ośrodków militarnych nad środkowym Dunajem – ten obszar łączy też z miejscem wykształcenia się stylu. Przyczynkiem wspierającym tę tezę jest motyw z okucia z Wrocławia-Zakrzowa (grób III), ukazujący orła z jeleniem i łączony z rzymskimi kultami militarnymi o korzeniach orientalnych (vide kult Jowisza Dolichenusa), szeroko rozpowszechnionych w III w. nad dunajskim *limesem* i na Bałkanach.

Połączenie wszystkich wskazanych cech w zabytkach z Nidajna, Wrocławia-Zakrzowa, Pielgrzymowa i z Ukrainy skutkuje ich unikatową, ale potwierdzoną źródłowo kombinacją, uzasadniając

decyzję o wyodrębnieniu *stylu Nidajno*. Proponowane datowanie zabytków będących jego reprezentacją rozciąga się od 2 poł. III w. (prawdopodobnie jego ostatniej tercji) do pierwszych dekad IV w. W chronologii względnej środkowoeuropejskiego *Barbaricum* ten przedział czasowy jest skorelowany z fazą C₂ okresu wpływów rzymskich.

10. Styl Nidajno: kontekst narodzin zjawiska, zasięg i skala jego oddziaływania, skutki kulturowej interakcji w *Barbaricum*

Treścią rozdziału jest problem genezy nowo zidentyfikowanego zjawiska stylistycznego, jakim jest styl Nidajno, jego relacje z tzw. *Römisch-Germanischer Mischhorizont*, a także możliwe konsekwencje jego obecności dla rozwoju nowych zjawisk stylistycznych w sztuce prowincjonalnorzymskiej i barbarzyńskiej. To na przedmiotach będących materialną ilustracją stylu Nidajno inicjalnie pojawia się (na elementach pasów i rzędu końskiego) połączenie bogatego zdobienia stempelkowego z częściowym złoceniem srebrnych powierzchni, z *niello* i wzorami zoomorficznymi. Wiele elementów stylistycznych wskazuje także na genetyczny związek okuć i sprzączek typu Nidajno z późniejszymi, późnorzymskimi garniturami pasów wojskowych, opatrzonych sprzączkami zdobionymi zwierzęcymi główkami. Podobny repertuar zoomorficznych przedstawień zapewne wskazuje także na ciągłość symbolicznego znaczenia tych wizerunków w kontekście militarnej ideologii, choć trzeba zauważyć, że ramy chronologiczne stylu Nidajno prawdopodobnie mieszczą się w ostatnich trzech dekadach III i na początku IV w., a powyższe garnitury pasów są datowane od ostatniej tercji IV w., co oznacza przynajmniej pół wieku różnicy w czasie ich wykorzystywania. Wyjaśnienie tej rozbieżności staje się zatem postulatem badawczym, który powinien być uwzględniony w dalszych studiach stylistycznych późnorzymskich elementów stroju militarnego.

W późniejszych interregionalnych, germańskich stylach zdobniczych (Sösdala-Untersiebenbrunn i Nydam) widoczne są kontynuacje i modyfikacje poszczególnych rozwiązań, widoczne w jednoczesnych trwaniu ornamentyki stempelkowej i odchodzeniu od naturalizmu właściwego dla przedstawień zoomorficznych w stylu Nidajno. Zestawienie naturalistycznych zwierzęcych wizerunków w stylu Nidajno z postępującą geometryzacją, stylizacją i narastającą tendencją do *horror vacui* w stylach Sösdala-Untersiebenbrunn i Nydam może być kolejną przesłanką wskazującą głębokie zakorzenienie wcześniejszego stylu Nidajno w sztuce rzymskiej i jego silniejsze genetyczne związki ze światem prowincjonalnorzymskim, aniżeli z barbarzyńskim interiozem. Pomimo tego, warty podkreślenia jest też pewnego rodzaju jego udział sprawczy w genezie stylów germańskich.

Analizowane w niniejszym opracowaniu przedmioty będąc przejawem oryginalnej koncepcji artystycznej są także świadectwem dalekosiężnych kontaktów lokalnej ludności – niezależnie czy trafiły one na Mazury bezpośrednio z miejsca wykonania, czy też znalazły się tam w wyniku wielu zdarzeń pośrednich. Jako czas i miejsce źródłowe dla stylu Nidajno wskazany został obszar nadlimesowy nad środkowym i, być może, dolnym Dunajem u schyłku III i w początkach IV

w. (środkowoeuropejska faza C₂). Ustalenia te pozwalają wskazać dwie alternatywne drogi możliwego dostarczenia tych przedmiotów na terytorium kultury bogaczewskiej. Pierwszą z nich jest szlak prowadzący z Kotliny Karpackiej na północ (świadectwem tego kierunku można wskazać powiązań jest m.in. wyposażenie okazałych grobów z Wrocławia-Zakrzowa), drugą zaś droga prowadząca przez rozległe terytoria zajmowane przez krąg kultur gockich na obszarze obecnej zachodniej Ukrainy, Kotliny Hrubieszowskiej i wschodniego Mazowsza (w tym przypadku przesłanką są zabytki z Ukrainy, funkcjonowanie tam gockiej organizacji militarnej i zbliżone okucia z wielbarskiego pochówku w Pielgrzymowie). Mniej prawdopodobny wydaje się kierunek zachodni i północno-zachodni, prowadzący do skandynawskiej strefy nadbałtyckiej, zajmowanej przez społeczności, której elity w okresie wpływów rzymskich nawiązały dalekosiężne powiązania z obszarami nad reńskim i dunajskim *limesem*. Widoczne w paradnych przedmiotach z Nidajna asocjacje z wyposażeniem elitarnych grobów „książęcych” z Wrocławia-Zakrzowa i Pielgrzymowa raczej ograniczają listę możliwych opcji w tym zakresie do południowego lub południowo-wschodniego kierunku relacji, których skutkiem było pojawienie się nidajnowskiego zestawu na Mazurach.

Można przyjąć, że charakter rytuałów takich jak ceremonie sprawowane nad Nidajnem wiązał się, oprócz oczywistej istoty religijnej, z manifestacją prestiżu, władzy i bogactwa ich uczestników. Jest przez to wielce prawdopodobne, że fenomen rytualnego niszczenia i zatapiania w bagnie seitek cennych przedmiotów nie pozostawał bez wpływu na pozasakralne aspekty kultury. Społeczne oddziaływanie tego typu rytuałów zapewne więc miało też miejsce w środowisku bałtyjskim. Oznacza to, że wraz z odkryciami w Nidajnie dość egalitarny obraz tych społeczności, wynikający z obserwacji cech obrządku pogrzebowego i braku wyraźnych archeologicznych wskaźników obecności militarnych elit został uzupełniony świadectwem nowego zjawiska, którego interpretacja wzbogaca całkowicie modyfikuje wyobrażenia o strukturze społecznej ludności Mazur w okresie wpływów rzymskich i formach realizowania religijno-obyczajowych potrzeb przynajmniej niektórych jej grup.

Rodzi to pytanie o to, czy dalekosiężne powiązania przedstawicieli kultury bogaczewskiej, ilustrowane działaniami realizowanymi wcześniej nad Nidajnem mogły mieć związek z późniejszymi, silnymi relacjami mieszkańców Mazur, widocznymi od początku okresu wędrówek ludów z południową i zachodnią Europą? Hipoteza zakładająca trwanie takiego „odległego echa” ma jednak charakter postulatyczny, a weryfikację jej słuszności przynieść mogą tylko przyszłe badania. Głównym postulatem badawczym jest zatem rozpoznanie dalszej, trudniej dostępnej części dawnego miejsca kultowego i pozyskanie większej serii znalezisk, co mogłoby pozwolić w sposób bardziej wiarygodny podjąć rozważania na temat jedno- lub wielofazowości stanowiska. Pracom tym powinno towarzyszyć szersze rozpoznanie w skali regionalnej, mogące przynieść skutek w postaci rejestracji podobnych do Nidajna stanowisk, co pozwoliłoby widzieć w fenomenie masowego zatapiania broni i innych cennych przedmiotów na Mazurach kulturowy standard, a nie spektakularny wyjątek.





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The discovery of a deposit of unique elements of warriors' armament and personal equipment, dated to the Roman period, within the former Lake Nidajno in Masuria is undoubtedly one of the most spectacular and at the same time unexpected archaeological discoveries made in Poland this century. (...) The presented issue has an enormous source value and a powerful cognitive potential, which has been largely exposed by the Author. (...) In conclusion, it must be emphasized that the monograph submitted for review by Dr. Aleksandra Rzeszotarska-Nowakiewicz represents an exceptionally valuable contribution to the study and interpretation of the unique assemblage of artifacts from the Nidajno swamp.

Dr. Hab. Judyta Rodzińska-Nowak,
Prof. UJ, Jagiellonian University in Kraków

I was presented with a richly illustrated „typescript” of a study of one of the most sensational discoveries made in Central Europe this century. There is probably no more anticipated book, which will significantly change our perception of the problems of late antiquity. (...) We have received - I will repeat the term used before - an extremely erudite work, inspiring admiration for the scope of the studies conducted and the immense effort invested in formulating the final conclusions.

prof. dr hab. Andrzej Kokowski,
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