

EPHEMERIS NAPOCENSIS

XXXV

2025

ROMANIAN ACADEMY
INSTITUTE OF ARCHAEOLOGY AND HISTORY OF ART CLUJ-NAPOCA

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În țară revista se poate procura prin poștă, pe bază de abonament la: EDITURA ACADEMIEI ROMÂNE, Calea 13 Septembrie nr. 13, sector 5, P. O. Box 5–42, București, România, RO–76117, Tel. 021–411.90.08, 021–410.32.00; fax. 021–410.39.83; RODIPET SA, Piața Presei Libere nr. 1, Sector 1, P. O. Box 33–57, Fax 021–222.64.07. Tel. 021–618.51.03, 021–222.41.26, București, România; ORION PRESS IMPEX 2000, P. O. Box 77–19, București 3 – România, Tel. 021–301.87.86, 021–335.02.96.

EPHEMERIS NAPOCENSIS

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DTP și tipar: MEGA PRINT
Coperta: Roxana Sfârlea



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Calea 13 Septembrie nr. 13, Sector 5, București 76117
Telefon 021–410.38.46; 021–410.32.00/2107, 2119

ACADEMIA ROMÂNĂ
INSTITUTUL DE ARHEOLOGIE ȘI ISTORIA ARTEI



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EDITURA ACADEMIEI ROMÂNE

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PARTICIPATION OF REPRESENTATIVES OF THE PRZEWORSK AND WIELBARK CULTURES IN THE MARCOMANNIC WARS: AN EXAMINATION OF HISTORICAL AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVIDENCE

Marek Ołędzki¹

Abstract: The article discusses the issue of the participation of representatives of the Przeworsk and Wielbark cultures in the course of the Marcomannic wars. This issue is reflected in both historical (written) and archaeological, i.e. material, sources. A simultaneous analysis of both these categories of sources leads to the conclusion that the Vandals/Viktovali can be identified with representatives of the Przeworsk culture, and the enigmatic-sounding „*superiores barbarii*” with tribes from the area of the Wielbark culture. This is further evidenced by the artefacts acquired from the Romans, with which the above-mentioned returned to their homeland, i.e. to areas north of the Sudeten Carpathian range. This can be seen almost exclusively in the Przeworsk territory, where a fairly abundant occurrence of Roman swords and chainmail is recorded. The complete absence of these objects in the area of the Wielbark culture can be explained by the specificity of the funerary rites of this culture, which forbid the giving of militaria, or iron objects in general, to the grave. To some extent, this lack is compensated for by the relatively abundant presence in the Wielbark area of bevelled bronze cauldrons brought from the Roman border regions, although I think only some of these may have come from looting.

Keywords: Vandals/Viktovali; “*superiores barbari*”; Przeworsk and Wielbark cultures; Roman inlaid swords; legionary fibulae; fragments of lorica hamata.

“*Victualis et Marcomannis cuncta turbantibus, aliis etiam gentibus, que pulsae a superioribus barbaris fugerant, nisi reciperentur, bellum inferentibus*”². This quotation originates from a biography of Marcus Aurelius in a late Roman work, likely from the fourth century, conventionally titled *Scriptores Historiae Augustae*, intended as a compilation of imperial biographies spanning from Hadrian to Numerian. According to other sources, this passage describes the crossing of the Middle Danube Limes by the Marcomanni and Victovali, who were swiftly defeated by Roman forces and driven beyond the border. This incident likely occurred at the start of the Marcomannic Wars, around 168/169³.

The quoted passage conveys a broad and layered spatial arrangement. Here, the Marcomanni and Victovali (“*Victualis*”) appear closest to the *limes*, while further beyond, the source mentions other, unidentified peoples (“*aliae gentes*”), who were being pressed by those at the opposite pole, termed *superiores barbari* – reference to “higher-dwelling” barbarians, or those living further afield. Within this tribal constellation, the Marcomanni are the best known and require no further definition here. Meanwhile, the more obscure *aliae gentes*, pressed by these “higher-dwelling” barbarians, remain an amorphous and indistinct group at our current stage

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² S.H.A., *Aur.*, 14, 1.

³ WIELOWIEJSKI 1982, 9; VLACH 2020, 34–35; OŁĘDZKI 2023, 90.

of research. Consequently, our focus shifts to the *Victualis* and the *superiores barbari*, who are mentioned separately and in a slightly more distinct manner in this passage.

This raises the question of how to interpret these terms, that is, with whom and with what we should identify their tribal designators. To answer this, we must examine both historical (written) and material (archaeological) sources, categorised according to cultural criteria. This approach necessitates an introduction to the Marcomannic – Quadian cultural circle during the broadly defined period of the Marcomannic Wars⁴, especially the archaeological evidence that illuminates cultural differentiations within this region. Such evidence can help distinguish incoming groups from the local cultural population and clarify their interrelationships. These findings will then be compared with relevant written sources to aid in the ethnic identification of the populations in question, as far as this is feasible. The study concludes with an examination of the return of these groups to their northern homelands, as reflected in material traces.

The discovery of materials exhibiting Przeworsk culture features within the Marcomannic – Quadian region first captured the attention of Czech and Slovak researchers, notably J. Tejral⁵ and T. Kolník⁶, who viewed these findings as evidence of northern influences, though initially in vague terms⁷. It was similarly described at one time by K. Godłowski⁸: “... the presence of these artefacts [i.e. of the Przeworsk culture – M. Ołędzki’s note] should be explained as the result of long-lasting cultural and trade contacts between areas located on both sides of the Carpathians and the Sudetes”. In the early 1990s, the author of this article further explored this issue⁹, compiling all known artefacts with Przeworsk characteristics from Bohemia, Moravia, western Slovakia, and northeastern Austria, encompassing the Marcomannic – Quadian cultural sphere. This collection included about thirty archaeological sites, primarily burial grounds, which were dated between phases B2 and C1a. During this study, traces of Wielbark culture materials were also identified, although their significance was initially downplayed¹⁰ due to the limited evidence available at the time.

The findings led to a proposal to distinguish and define a “Danube group of the Przeworsk culture” – a term that, in retrospect, seems problematic. These materials were scattered across the Marcomannic – Quadian area and often coexisted with locally derived forms. Therefore, the term “group”, which implies a more cohesive and well-defined region, appears unsuitable here. Nonetheless, current research highlights the notable presence of Przeworsk and Wielbark materials. They are found in Marcomannic and Quadian cemeteries and settlements, as well as in Roman military complexes along the *limes* and within Roman military camps marking invasion routes into Marcomannic and Quadian territory¹¹.

Examples concerning the aforementioned Roman military complexes worth mentioning are: two Przeworsk-style J.7a/2 type shield bosses¹² excavated from a well in the auxiliary camp at *Carnuntum*¹³, alongside a damaged shield boss of similar design from a marching camp

⁴ OŁĘDZKI 2023, *passim*.

⁵ TEJRAL 1970; TEJRAL 1983.

⁶ KOLNÍK 1980.

⁷ In one of his recent works, J. Tejral (TEJRAL 2010, 36–37) revised his perspective to align with the prevailing *communis opinio*, accepting that specific human groups from the north did indeed penetrate the middle Danube region.

⁸ GODŁOWSKI 1985, 84.

⁹ OŁĘDZKI 1993, 65–73; OŁĘDZKI 1996, 49–67.

¹⁰ He reasoned that these artefacts, although initially few, likely accompanied representatives of the Przeworsk culture moving southward. In the indigenous Przeworsk area, Wielbark materials also appear occasionally, suggesting more an influx of objects than of people.

¹¹ KOMORÓCZY ET ALII 2020, 173–254; OŁĘDZKI 2023, 115–123.

¹² JAHN 1916; LIANA 1970.

¹³ JILEK 1994, 398, Fig. 3.

discovered by E. Droberjar at Jevičko, where a typically Wielbark silver snake bracelet end was also found¹⁴. Similarly, in the *Celamantia* camp at Iža-Leányvár, opposite to the *Brigetio castrum* on the Danube's left bank¹⁵, Przeworsk artefacts such as an A.V 129 fibula¹⁶, two J.9/2 type grips¹⁷, and a bronze spur from J. Ginalski's E group were recovered¹⁸.

A large number of artefacts of the Przeworsk culture has been shown especially by recent research, including at the Sekule cemetery located in the Marcomannic – Quadian border zone¹⁹, where “pure” Przeworsk graves have been discovered, with furnishings similar to those found in central and southern Poland²⁰. These materials can be broadly associated with Przeworsk women, including fibulae types A.II 41Y, A.II 43, and A.V 129, various pendants, buckles, and highly profiled, hand-crafted black-glazed vessels. For Przeworsk men, items typically include military gear from groups 4a M. Olędzki²¹ and, to an even greater extent, group 5 according to K. Godłowski²². These artefacts often include belt components such as buckles from group G according to R. Madyda-Legutko²³ and belt ends of group III, types 4 and 5, according to the same author²⁴, along with metal shield fittings like J.9 grips and J.7a shield bosses, iron scissors, and Buch-Podlodów and Lachmirowice-Apa swords²⁵. Swords, however, are not highly diagnostic in this case, unless they come from closed collections with uniformly Przeworsk characteristics, and this is because their shapes are common standards (resulting from functional considerations) and therefore also occur in local Suebi graves, or generally throughout Central European Barbaricum²⁶. The same, with a high degree of probability, can be said about spearheads and javelin heads from this period²⁷.

On the other hand, a good indicator, but this time with both Przeworsk and Wielbark culture characteristics, are E-group spurs with small conical goads and short button-ended arms, as defined by Ginalski²⁸. Notably, Wielbark examples are exclusively bronze, whereas Przeworsk examples are iron²⁹. For instance, ten spurs were found in the “royal” tomb at Mušov³⁰ and within the Roštěni cemetery in central Moravia (**Fig. 1**), where they appeared in nearly a third of the graves³¹, thus constituting a peculiar phenomenon in terms of numbers³². Let us add that

¹⁴ DROBERJAR/JARUŠKOVA 2017, 28, Fig. 25; 89, Fig. 175.

¹⁵ RAJTAR 1992, 168, Fig. 20; HÜSSEN/RAJTAR 1994, 226, Fig. 2.

¹⁶ ALMGREN 1923.

¹⁷ JAHN 1916; LIANA 1970.

¹⁸ GINALSKI 1991.

¹⁹ The Little Carpathian range is considered the boundary between the Suebi tribes, with the Marcomanni located to the west and the Quadi to the east. To the south, likely in the vicinity of present-day Bratislava, were the seats of the Naristi. Written sources support this distribution, although material culture across these societies shows essentially no distinctions.

²⁰ IVÁN/KOVÁCOVÁ/RAJTAR 2019, 291–326.

²¹ OLĘDZKI 2019, 141–144.

²² GODŁOWSKI 1994, 171–172, Fig. 5.

²³ MADYDA-LEGUTKO 1978.

²⁴ MADYDA-LEGUTKO 2011.

²⁵ DROBERJAR 2021, 221–243.

²⁶ BIBORSKI/ILKJAER 2006; MIKS 2007.

²⁷ KACZANOWSKI 1992.

²⁸ GINALSKI 1991, 60, Fig. 11.

²⁹ Information from Dr E. Smółka-Antkowiak, a researcher focusing on the broad issue of spurs in Central European Barbaricum, has been invaluable in this regard. The author gratefully acknowledges her contribution and permission to publish this data.

³⁰ PEŠKA 2002.

³¹ FOJTIK/POPELKA/ZEMAN 2021, 253–270.

³² In the cemetery, 28 spurs were discovered, 25 of which belong to group E, as classified by J. Ginalski, see GINALSKI 1991. Notably, these spurs appeared individually within the graves.

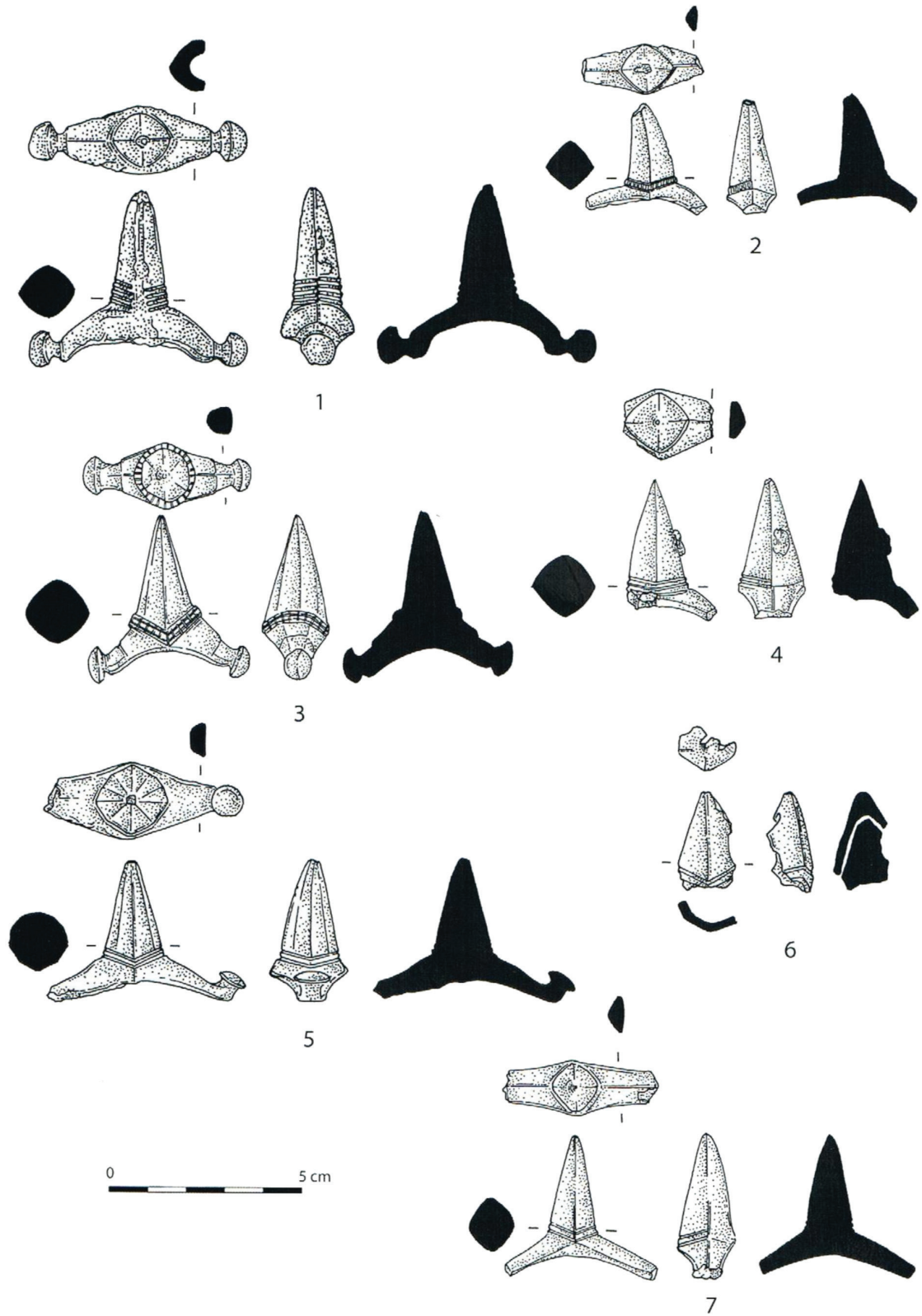


Fig. 1. Finds of the spurs from Roštěni. Selection of the finds (according to FOJTIK/POPELKA/ZEMAN 2021).

they were all made of bronze. This may indicate a burial site for a group of Wielbark horsemen, potentially casualties from a single battle with the Romans. This hypothesis is supported both by the burial dating and the close proximity – just five kilometres – to a Roman marching camp, the relics of which were discovered in the village of Hulin-Pravčice³³.

Regarding the presence of Przeworsk culture artefacts in the middle Danube region, they sufficiently represent both female and male individuals, suggesting that shortly before the Marcomannic Wars³⁴, a sizeable group from this culture arrived, bringing its customs. This group appears to have been peacefully received by the local Suebi and was distributed fairly evenly across their territory. It is also likely that a similar, albeit smaller, group from the Wielbark culture settled in the area, as evidenced by artefacts characteristic of this culture. In addition to the previously mentioned bronze spurs, these artefacts include items crafted in the so-called Wielbark Baroque style, often made of silver or even gold, such as serpentine bracelets, pear-shaped pendants with filigree and granulation, and other small items. The most striking examples of these artefacts have been found at sites such as Wulzeshofen in Austria³⁵, Slovak cemeteries in Abrahám³⁶, Kostolná³⁷, and Zohor³⁸, and the previously mentioned Moravian site of Jevičko³⁹. These items belong to the same chronological horizon and suggest an apparent overrepresentation of female individuals; however, this is somewhat misleading. This impression arises from Wielbark funerary customs, wherein male grave goods included only parts of the belt (bronze buckles and ends) and bronze spurs, which, as noted, appear in significant numbers.

Now that we understand the scale of the phenomenon and have precisely identified the sources of the archaeological materials of interest, along with those responsible for their presence, we can return to the initial question: identifying these bearers with references in written sources. As previously noted, the sources use terms like *Victovali* (“*Victuali*”, “*Victohali*”) and the higher- or further-dwelling *superiores barbari*. Let us begin with the former. In addition to the source mentioned earlier (the SHA), the “*Victohali*” are also noted by Ammianus Marcellinus⁴⁰ and Eutropius (“*Victuali*”)⁴¹. Both authors, like the biographer of Marcus Aurelius (whoever that may have been), are Late Roman historians. Interestingly, Ammianus associates the *Victovali* with the Vandal Hasdingi, who, from 171 onwards, occupied the upper Tisza area⁴² and apparently did not engage in the settlement of the Suebi-inhabited regions north of the middle Danube. The Vandal Hasdingi were well-established in the Tisza region, enjoying Roman approval in the form of a *foedus iniquum*. So, what did these cited authors mean?

In my view, they likely referred to the Vandals in a broader sense. This is evidenced by the interchangeable usage of “*Vandali*” and “*Victovali*” in the SHA (cf. S.H.A., *Aur.* 14, 1, *Aur.* 22, 1, and *Aur.* 17, 3), along with the recognition that the Hasdingi, regardless of their varied reputation, were not the only Vandal tribe. For instance, the Silingi – referred to as “*Σίλιγγαι*” or “*Vandali cognomine Silingi*” – are usually associated with the Silesian region⁴³, although this

³³ FOJTIK/POPELKA/ZEMAN 2021, 254, Fig. 1 (map).

³⁴ That is, during **sub-phase B2c**, which roughly corresponds to the period of the so-called *bellum suspensum*, preceding the main phase of these wars, see OLEŹDZKI 2019, 144; OLEŹDZKI 2023, *passim*.

³⁵ BENINGER 1932, 215–238, Figs. 1–10.

³⁶ KOLNIK 1980, 73–74, Pls. 58–59.

³⁷ KOLNIK 1980, 115, Pl. 107.

³⁸ ELSCHEK 2014, 121, Fig. 10.

³⁹ I have not included Czech finds here, as there are no clear signs of Marcomannic warfare in the Bohemian Basin, despite the discovery of both Przeworsk and Wielbark materials in the region.

⁴⁰ AMM. MARC. XVII, 12, 19.

⁴¹ EUTROPIUS, *Breviarium* VIII, 2, 2.

⁴² For instance, EUTROPIUS (*Breviarium* VIII, 2, 2) noted: “...*provincia trans Danubium (a Traiano) facta in his agris quos nunc Taifali, Victuali et Tervingi habent*”.

⁴³ GODŁOWSKI 1985, 144.

association is occasionally disputed. Nevertheless, it is undeniable that they were the second most prominent Vandal tribe, with their Silesian location indirectly supported by a good source, namely Dio Cassius⁴⁴, who states that the Elbe originates in the “Vandal mountains” – corresponding to the Sudeten Mountains, from which the river indeed flows. However, was it only from Silesia that the Przeworsk culture carriers originated, who, on the eve of the Marcomannic Wars, found themselves in the near-*limes* zone inhabited by the Marcomanni, Quadi, and Naristi, entering into a kind of “partnership” with these groups? Clearly not, as will become apparent when we later document the return of some of these individuals to their homeland with spoils from battles with the Romans. It will show that this movement involved the entire Przeworsk culture area, with the exception of its eastern Vistula region, which, following the expulsion of the main Hasdingi group, became predominantly Gothic⁴⁵.

Why, then, do none of the sources mention the Burgundians in this context, even though Ptolemy⁴⁶, locates them within what is widely regarded as the northern, or rather central, Przeworsk culture area⁴⁷. This remains unknown. It is possible that they were classified among “*aliae gentes*” or even “*superiores barbari*”. Late antique authors would not have been expected to know or recognise the nuanced cultural distinctions between Germanic tribes, which are identifiable to today’s archaeologists. However, we can be fairly certain that the “*superiores barbari*” included Wielbark culture representatives, whose presence on the middle Danube has already been demonstrated. Additionally, it appears likely that these were non-Gothic “Wielbark” groups, since the Goths were occupied with “colonising” the former Eastern Przeworsk zone at the time⁴⁸. Remaining in Pomerania and northern Greater Poland, these groups may have included the Scirii, Rugians, and the “habitually late and lazy” Gepids⁴⁹. However, none of these tribes are explicitly mentioned in connection with the Marcomannic Wars.

Instead, the name of another tribe surfaces that may have acted as “*superiores barbari*” – the Longobards, who were allied with the enigmatic Obii⁵⁰. The Longobards’ involvement in the Marcomannic Wars was unique: after being defeated and driven back by the Romans, they managed to avoid complete destruction and returned to their original territory along the lower Elbe. Among the Roman spoils they took back were ring-pommel swords, or *Ringknaufschwerter*, now found in this region⁵¹.

However, it is not the Longobards referenced in the Life of Marcus Aurelius mentioned at the beginning of the article, where the term “*superiores barbari*” appears⁵². By the time the Marcomanni and Victovali, pressured by these “*superiores barbari*” or “*aliae gentes*”, attacked the Roman frontiers, the Longobards had likely already returned to their homeland, content with their spoils and tales of valour. Indeed, there was a time gap of at least one to two years between the two sets of military engagements on the middle Danube for these distinct groups⁵³. Furthermore, by then, their distinct identity was well known, recorded in contemporary sources.

⁴⁴ CASS. DIO 55, 1; 3.

⁴⁵ OLEŃDZKI 2022, 61–83.

⁴⁶ PTOL. II, 11, 8–9.

⁴⁷ GODŁOWSKI 1985, 143–144; OLEŃDZKI 2008, 88–89.

⁴⁸ ANDRZEJOWSKI 2001, 59–87; OLEŃDZKI 2022, 43; 70–75.

⁴⁹ Archaeological evidence suggests that in these areas, Wielbark culture settlements persisted until at least the C1b phase and, in exceptional cases, even the C2 phase, see WOŁĄGIEWICZ 1981, 83–85.

⁵⁰ CASS. DIO 71, 3, 1.

⁵¹ RADDATZ 1961, 39–41; KACZANOWSKI 1994, 215, Fig. 4 (map).

⁵² S.H.A., *Aur.*, 14, 1.

⁵³ KEHNE 2016, 241; OLEŃDZKI 2023, 90–91.

Roman Swords with Inlays at the Base of the Blade

These swords stood out for both their technical and aesthetic qualities. Made using a forged Damascus technique, which was unfamiliar to barbarian groups at the time, these swords featured narrow fullers and, most strikingly, eye-catching inlays near the base of the blade. In Roman circles, these were elite weapons, likely carried by military figures of higher rank – perhaps from centurions upwards. They thus fell into the category of highly coveted trophies, obtainable only in combat⁵⁴.

Extensive literature exists on these swords, with two foundational studies particularly noteworthy, still up-to-date despite the growing number of sources: the analysis by M. Biborski⁵⁵ and the work by T. J. Horbacz and M. Ołędzki⁵⁶. The former offers a formal and typological breakdown of the specimens, focusing mainly on the swords and their dating, and, in the case of inlaid representations, only their identification, which, we should add, is not always accurate. The second provides a semantic and historical interpretation of the inlay designs, correlating these stylistic elements with the sword types. Through this research, two primary groups of swords emerge: group I, represented by fairly wide, medium-length spathas, often featuring realistic inlays, and group II, including swords that were much narrower and slightly longer, which, due to the tapering towards the hilt, were called “rapier-like”.

The inlays on the latter were, without exception, schematic, even geometric or abstract in nature⁵⁷. The themes of these inlays, regardless of their form, frequently depict images associated with war, combat, and triumphs in this field. Thus, the predominant images are of Mars, primarily Ultor, the winged Victoria holding a victory wreath (*Victoria Augusti*), and various *insignia et ornamenta triumphalia*, such as legionary eagles with accompanying cohort and maniple standards as well as wreaths, palms, and palmettes.

Typologically, group I swords correspond primarily to the “Buch–Podlódów” and “Lauriacum–Hromówka” types, known for their narrow fullers⁵⁸, while group II swords typically belong to the “Straubing–Nydam” type with their distinctive “rapier-like” blade⁵⁹. Chronologically, group I swords date to phases B2b–C1a (approximately 120–220 AD), while group II swords fall within phases C1b–C2, or roughly 220–300/320 AD.

The distribution of swords with inlays, as documented from Scandinavia to areas near the Roman *limes*⁶⁰, reveals that over half of the finds originated in Przeworsk culture territories, with a marked prevalence of group I swords (**Fig. 2**). Given their dating, these swords can be contextualised within the acquisitions made by Przeworsk culture members who were engaged in the Marcomannic Wars. A large proportion of these specimens are so-called loose finds with no clear context, yet several have been uncovered in richly furnished burial complexes, alongside

⁵⁴ I believe this was not only because the trade in arms with the barbarians was prohibited by the *Lex Julia Maiestatis*, but probably because they were never intended for trade at all. They were crafted by specialised legion smiths, likely on special commissions from officers who paid extra. In later periods, production shifted to state-run facilities, the imperial arms *fabricae*. We are referring to group II swords (see below), whose inlaid representations are simpler and more schematic, suggesting they were produced more rapidly and likely on a larger scale. In the Barbaricum area, the largest number of these were recovered from the Scandinavian bog sites such as Illerup and Nydam.

⁵⁵ BIBORSKI 1994, 109–135.

⁵⁶ HORBACZ/OLEĐZKI 1998, 19–30.

⁵⁷ The inlays on both group I and group II swords were made from copper or copper alloys, typically *aurichalcum*, which were placed into pre-formed recesses on the blade in the intended shape. In the current state of preservation of swords, which after all were usually burnt on the cremation pyre, the inlays are rarely preserved. In such cases, only their negative impressions remain, providing evidence of their original design.

⁵⁸ BIBORSKI/ILKJAER 2006.

⁵⁹ ULBERT 1974.

⁶⁰ BIBORSKI 1994, 133, Fig. 9 (map); HORBACZ/OLEĐZKI 1998, 20, Fig. 1 (map).

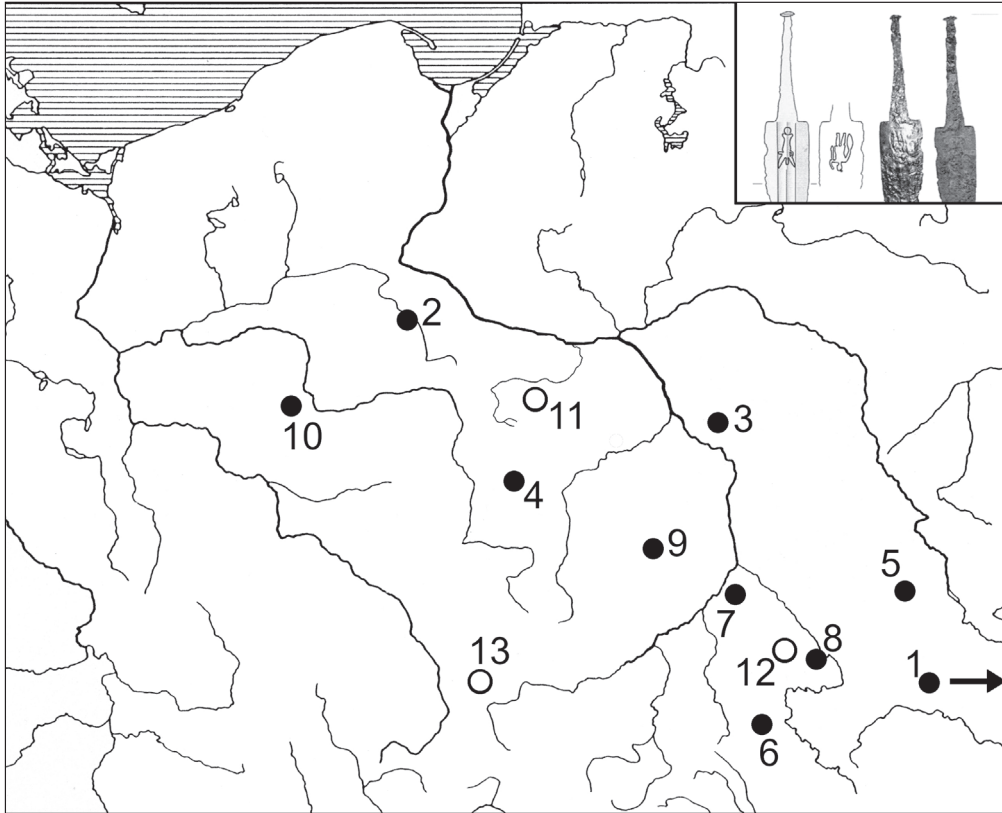


Fig. 2. Distribution of Roman inlaid swords from the Przeworsk culture (black point – swords of group I; ring – swords of group II). 1. Hromówka, rej. Chmielnicki, Ukraina, grave (BIBORSKI 1994, 133 Fig. 9/11; HORBACZ/OLĘDZKI 1998, 20 Fig. 1/33); 2. Lachmirowice, distr. Inowrocław, grave 9 (BIBORSKI 1994, 133 Fig. 9/22; HORBACZ/OLĘDZKI 1998, 20 Fig. 1/22); 3. Oblin, distr. Garwolin, grave 45b (BIBORSKI 1994, 133 Fig. 25; HORBACZ/OLĘDZKI 1998, 20 Fig. 1/30); 4. Piaski, distr. Bełchatów, grave 171 (BIBORSKI 1994, 133, Fig. 9/28; HORBACZ/OLĘDZKI 1998, 20 Fig. 1/24); 5. Podlodów, distr. Tomaszów Lubelski, grave (BIBORSKI 1994, 133 Fig. 9/29; HORBACZ/OLĘDZKI 1998, 20 Fig. 1/32); 6. Prusiek, distr. Sanok, pit 42 (RODZIŃSKA-NOWAK/ZAGÓRSKA-TELEGA 2021, 271, 274 Fig. 3); 7. Rzczyca Długa, distr. Stalowa Wola, loose find (BIBORSKI 1994, 133 Fig. 9/32; HORBACZ/OLĘDZKI 1994, 20 Fig. 1/29); 8. Żurawiczki, distr. Przeworsk, loose find (BIBORSKI 1994, 133 Fig. 9/37; HORBACZ/OLĘDZKI 1998, 20 Fig. 1/31); 9. The unknown site, former voiv. Kieleckie (BIBORSKI 1994, 133 Fig. 9/40; HORBACZ/OLĘDZKI 1998, 20 Fig. 1/27); 10. The unknown site, former voiv. Wielkopolskie (BIBORSKI 1994, 133 Fig. 9/38; HORBACZ/OLĘDZKI 1998, 20 Fig. 1/21); 11. Biała, distr. Zgierz, grave 11 (BIBORSKI 1994, 133 Fig. 9/2; HORBACZ/OLĘDZKI 1998, 20 Fig. 1/25); 12. Gać, distr. Przeworsk, loose find from cemetery (BIBORSKI 1994, 133 Fig. 9/7; HORBACZ/OLĘDZKI 1998, 20 Fig. 1/28); 13. Pławniowice, distr. Gliwice, grave (ABŁAMOWICZ/PODYMA 2002, 127, 133 Fig. 3/a-b). Notice – In the corner of a map is the inlaid sword from Prusiek with figures Mars and Victoria (by RODZIŃSKA-NOWAK/ZAGÓRSKA-TELEGA 2021, Fig. 3).

other well-dated objects, including both elements of armour in the strict sense of the word and metal accessories of the buried person's costume, such as buckles, fibulae, etc.

Notable examples include burials from sites such as Oblin, grave 45b⁶¹, Podlodów⁶², Lachmirowice, grave 9⁶³, Piaski, grave 171⁶⁴, Hromówka⁶⁵, and more recently also Prusiek,

⁶¹ CZARNECKA 2007, 22, Pls. 47–50.

⁶² GURBA/ŚLUSARSKI 1966, Fasc. 17, Pl. 110.

⁶³ ZIELONKA 1951–1952, 364 Fig. 7.

⁶⁴ HORBACZ/OLĘDZKI 1985, 71–111.

⁶⁵ DĄBROWSKA/GODŁOWSKI 1970, 77–102.

pit 42⁶⁶. Some graves, such as those at Lachmirowice, Piaski (Fig. 3), and Podlodów, contained model weapon sets belonging to group 5, according to K. Godłowski⁶⁷, dated to the C1a phase, which in its “pure form” today can be included in the relatively narrow period of 170/175–210/220⁶⁸. Thus, it appears that these swords, along with their bearers, likely reached Przeworsk territories either following the *Expediatio Germanica Prima* or, more plausibly, after the peace of 180 that concluded the *Expediatio Germanica Secunda*. This arrival likely occurred before the close of the 2nd century.

The chronology and history of the inlaid sword from Prusiek, Sanok District, appear to be comparable⁶⁹. Conversely, the sword from Hromówka was found alongside guiding forms characteristic of the C1a phase, such as a shield grip of the J.9/2 variety, as well as artefacts

linked to the C1b phase, particularly spurs of the F3b variant according to J. Ginalski⁷⁰. This suggests the burial likely took place at the transition between the two phases, corresponding to the second or third decade of the 3rd century in absolute terms.

Assuming that the owner of this sword had some compelling reason beyond mere homesickness to return, it is tempting to connect this with Cassius Dio’s account of Emperor Caracalla’s disputes with his former allies, the Marcomanni and Vandals, and his simultaneous pacification of the Quadi tribe⁷¹. This may have triggered a collective exodus of those “Przeworsk” Vandals/Victovali who had not yet left the Marcomannic – Quadian territories. Recall that this

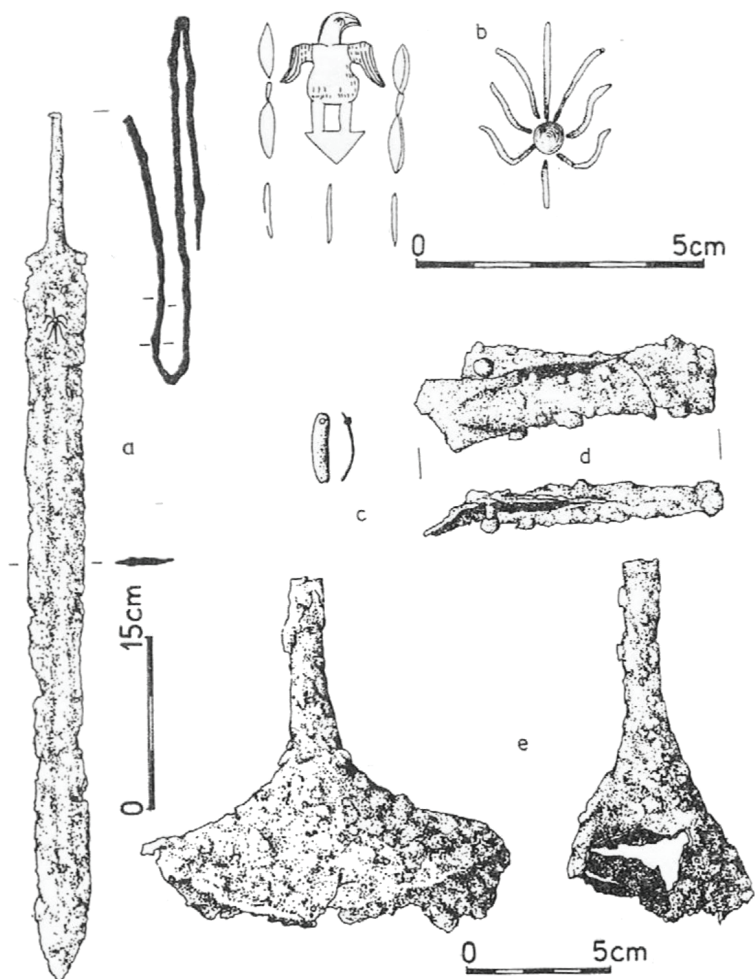


Fig. 3. Inlaid sword from Piaski, grave 171, by HORBACZ/OŁĘDZKI 1985.

⁶⁶ MADYDA-LEGUTKO/RODZIŃSKA-NOWAK/ZAGÓRSKA-TELEGA 2008, 47–51; RODZIŃSKA-NOWAK/ZAGÓRSKA-TELEGA 2021, 271; 274, Fig. 3.

⁶⁷ GODŁOWSKI 1994, 171–172, Fig. 5.

⁶⁸ In its “pure form”, i.e. excluding considerations of the B2/C1 phase as a transitional period, which earlier scholarship treated as a “buffer” phase, see OŁĘDZKI 2019, 133–155.

⁶⁹ MADYDA-LEGUTKO/RODZIŃSKA-NOWAK/ZAGÓRSKA-TELEGA 2008, 47–51.

⁷⁰ GINALSKI 1991, 66, Fig. 13/13–14.

⁷¹ CASS. DIO 78, 20, 3–4.

exodus occurred in 213 or 214, when Caracalla was addressing incursions into the Dacian and Pannonian *limes* by barbarians through both military and diplomatic means⁷².

In contrast, another inlaid sword specimen, also belonging to the first group but with a much earlier chronology, is the one from Oblin discovered in grave 45b⁷³. This is indicated by the typology of this sword, classified as Lachmirowice-Apa type⁷⁴, and the rich assemblage of artefacts accompanying it⁷⁵. The artefacts included a shield boss of the J.7a/1 variety, a grip of the same J.9/2 variety, as many as three spearheads of type VIII/1 according to P. Kaczanowski⁷⁶, two spurs from the E group according to J. Ginalski⁷⁷, and an iron fibula of type A.V 123 according to O. Almgren⁷⁸. This grave serves as a strong example of weapon-equipped graves, which M. Olędzki has recently identified as “group 4a”⁷⁹, incorporating elements from both groups 4 and 5 as defined by K. Godłowski⁸⁰. Its well-defined chronology places it in subphase B2c, which corresponds to the period 145/150–170/175 AD. Thus, it seems that the warrior buried in grave 45b at Oblin would have had the opportunity to engage in combat only during the initial phase of the major conflict, possibly in 168/169, when the Marcomanni and Victovali were breaching the Pannonian *limes* (see above), or in the year 170 – *annus horribilis* – when Rome faced simultaneous invasions from all border tribes, including the Vandals⁸¹.

In concluding the theme of trophies in the form of Roman swords with inlays, it is essential to consider their distribution within the Przeworsk culture (**Fig. 2**). The mapped finds show a relatively even spread, although with a notable concentration in the southeastern part of the Przeworsk area.

To close this section, it is clear that warriors from the southeastern Przeworsk culture likely participated in the conflicts conventionally referred to as the Marcomannic Wars. However, the Vandals-Hasdingi, bound by the *foedus iniquum* treaty with Rome at that time, did not take part. This agreement made them – at least for several decades – allies of the still-powerful Roman Empire.

Legionary-Type Fibulae

Another category of artefacts that reached areas north of the Sudeten and Carpathian Mountains during and immediately after the Marcomannic Wars are the so-called legionary-type fibulae (German: *Limesfibeln*). These were made of copper alloys and are descriptively known as “knee-shaped fibulae with a semicircular plate on the head”⁸². In O. Almgren’s typology⁸³, they are classified as type A. 247 (**Fig. 4**). Though their range is extensive, legionary-type fibulae are primarily associated with the European *limes* territories of the Roman Empire, especially in the Danube provinces⁸⁴. North of the *limes*, they appear less frequently, following a general pattern:

⁷² Around this period, specifically at the close of the C1a phase, Przeworsk culture settlements in the Marcomannic-Quadian areas began to vanish, see OLEŃDZKI 1996, 52–53.

⁷³ CZARNECKA 2007, 212, Pl. 48/2.

⁷⁴ BIBORSKI/ILKJAER 2006.

⁷⁵ CZARNECKA 2007, 22, Pl. 47–50.

⁷⁶ KACZANOWSKI 1992.

⁷⁷ GINALSKI 1991.

⁷⁸ ALMGREN 1923.

⁷⁹ OLEŃDZKI 2019, 141–144.

⁸⁰ GODŁOWSKI 1994, 171–172, Fig. 5.

⁸¹ S.H.A., *Aur.* 22, 1.

⁸² BÖHME-SCHÖNBERGER 1998, 362.

⁸³ ALMGREN 1923, 110–111.

⁸⁴ KOVRIG 1937; JOBST 1975.

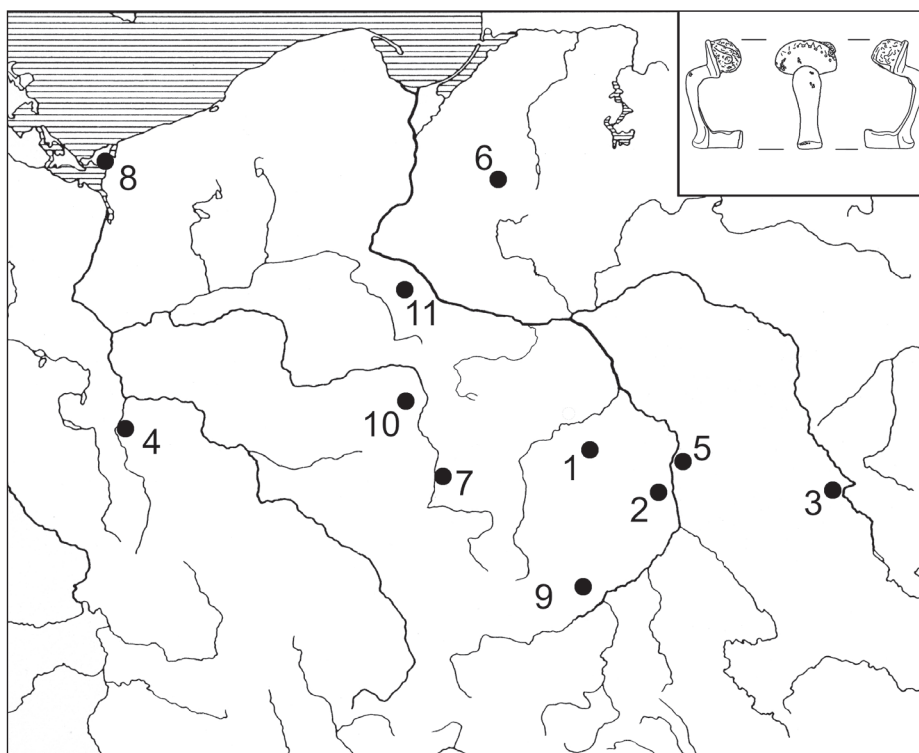


Fig. 4. Distribution of Roman legionary fibulae (A.147) north of the Sudeten-Carpathian range. 1. Brudnów, distr. Radom, loose find (OLEŹDZKI 2007, 114–115, Fig. 2/7); 2. Chmielów Piaskowy, distr. Ostrowiec Świętokrzyski, grave 11 (2 × A.147) (GODŁOWSKI/WICHMAN 1998, 19–20, Pl. XIII); 3. Gródek nad Bugiem, distr. Hrubieszów, loose find from cemetery (GŁADYSZ-JUŚCIŃSKA 2003, 193–200, Fig. 2A); 4. Gubin, loose find found near city Gubin (2 × A.147) (OLEŹDZKI 2007, 113–115, Fig. 2/3.9); 5. Nieszawa-Kolonia, distr. Opole Lubelskie, loose find from settlement (GŁADYSZ-JUŚCIŃSKA 2003, 193–200, Fig. 1A); 6. Stolno, distr. Ostróda, from barrow I (WALUŚ/KOWALEWSKA 1999, 23 Fig. 15/1); 7. Stobin, distr. Wieluń, loose find from settlement (ABRAMEK 1982, 157–159, Fig. 5/d); 8. Wolin, distr. Kamień, grave 4 (MACHAJEWSKI 2000, 243 Fig. 2); 9. Zagórzycze, distr. Kazimierza Wielka, loose find from settlement (GRYGIEL/PIKULSKI/TROJAN 2009, Fig. 23/2); 10. Kwiatków, distr. Turek, loose find from settlement (3 × A.147) (PIOTROWSKA/RUTKOWSKI 2023, 302–303, Fig. 2/1–3); 11. Perkowo, distr. Inowrocław, loose find (KURPIEWSKI/RAKOCZY 2015, Pl. 18).

the further from Roman borders, the fewer the finds⁸⁵. Importantly, unlike Roman swords, these fibulae were not traded over long distances with barbarians; they were instead an integral part of the Roman soldier's attire, used to fasten the coat⁸⁶. Nor was there significant demand for them in the *Barbaricum*, as local populations were already satisfied with fibulae of type A.V, series 8, as per O. Almgren⁸⁷. These locally produced Przeworsk and Wielbark fibulae were similar in form but typically more ornate⁸⁸.

The distribution of legionary-type fibulae north of the Sudeten – Carpathian range is shown on our map (Fig. 4). Due to their limited numbers, the map also includes a few examples from sites neighbouring the Przeworsk – Wielbark areas, such as a specimen from Wolin, site

⁸⁵ OLEŹDZKI 2007, 113–117; DROBERJAR 2012, 119–131.

⁸⁶ ETTLINGER 1973, 135.

⁸⁷ ALMGREN 1923, Pl. VI, Figs. 123–131.

⁸⁸ In the Przeworsk culture, where fibulae were often made of iron, they were frequently inlaid with silver, while Wielbark specimens were often covered with an embossed gold plate.

49, grave 4, from the area of the so-called Gustow group⁸⁹ and two stray finds from near Gubin, belonging to the Luboszyce culture, now housed in the Archaeological Museum in Poznań. The leading group comprises ten Przeworsk specimens, typically found in isolation, except at the settlement in Kwiatkowo on the Warta River, where three fibulae of this type were discovered – each with a slightly different shape, suggesting they were produced in various Roman workshops⁹⁰. Only two specimens are known from the Wielbark culture, found at distant sites: one stray find from Gródek on the Bug⁹¹, and one from barrow no. I in Stolno, Warmian-Masurian Voivodeship⁹², where a bronze A.41-type cap fibula was discovered along with the legionary specimen.

These Przeworsk and Marcomannic-Quadian finds align with the period of the Marcomannic Wars of interest to us⁹³, a time marked by numerous encounters between Roman troops and barbarian forces, providing ample opportunities for the acquisition of such items. Naturally, a legionary-type fibula would not have carried the same status as a sword won in combat, whose value lay in its functional and utilitarian properties. For fibulae, however, their significance likely derived more from their symbolic or magical qualities as humble objects obtained under the same circumstances as a sword.

Ring Mail Fragments (*Lorica Hamata*)

It should be said at the outset that the finds of *lorica hamata* fragments are significantly more abundant and informative than those of fibulae discussed above. These fragments have been recorded at as many as 25 Przeworsk sites, predominantly in graves where they were exclusively part of women's grave goods (**Fig. 5**). In contrast, only two near-complete examples, which might have been functional as intended for a barbarian warrior, have been identified: one from the settlement at Nowa Huta – Pleszów⁹⁴ and a rich warrior's burial in Witaszewice, grave 22⁹⁵. The majority of these finds, however, consist of fragmentary items, often reused – presumably for creating bracelets, possibly necklaces, or “pectorals”, decorated with metal shields and miniature everyday items. Particularly well-preserved examples come from Opatów graves no. 49 (Fig. 6) and no. 147⁹⁶, and from Piaski near Bełchatów, grave no. 95⁹⁷, where they were associated with artefacts dated to the Marcomannic Wars. However, most finds consist only of small chain mail fragments, sometimes as little as a few linked rings, raising doubts as to whether they served the practical function suggested above. It is possible that these fragments had symbolic significance (*pars pro toto*), serving as reminders of the spouse or donor who had acquired these trophies at great personal risk.

All datable finds of ring mail fragments fall within the general timeframe of the Marcomannic Wars⁹⁸; however, subtle differences are observed in the dating of older and younger assemblages containing these artefacts. The older assemblages align with subphase B2c, while the younger ones correspond to the following phase C1a. Particularly notable are finds from the cemeteries of Krupice, Podlaskie Voivodeship, grave 208⁹⁹ and Łajski, Mazowieckie

⁸⁹ MACHAJEWSKI 2000, 243, Fig. 2.

⁹⁰ PIOTROWSKA/RUTKOWSKI 2023, 299–313.

⁹¹ GŁADYSZ-JUŚCIŃSKA 2003, 193–195.

⁹² WALUŚ/KOWALEWSKA 1999, 23.

⁹³ OLĘDZKI 2007, 113–117; DROBERJAR 2012, 119–131.

⁹⁴ KONTNY 2019, 39.

⁹⁵ TYSZLER 2015, 107–135.

⁹⁶ GODŁOWSKI 1960, Pls. 29–30.

⁹⁷ HORBACZ/OLĘDZKI 1983, Pl. 307.

⁹⁸ OLĘDZKI 2023, *passim*.

⁹⁹ JASKANIS 2005, 53–54.

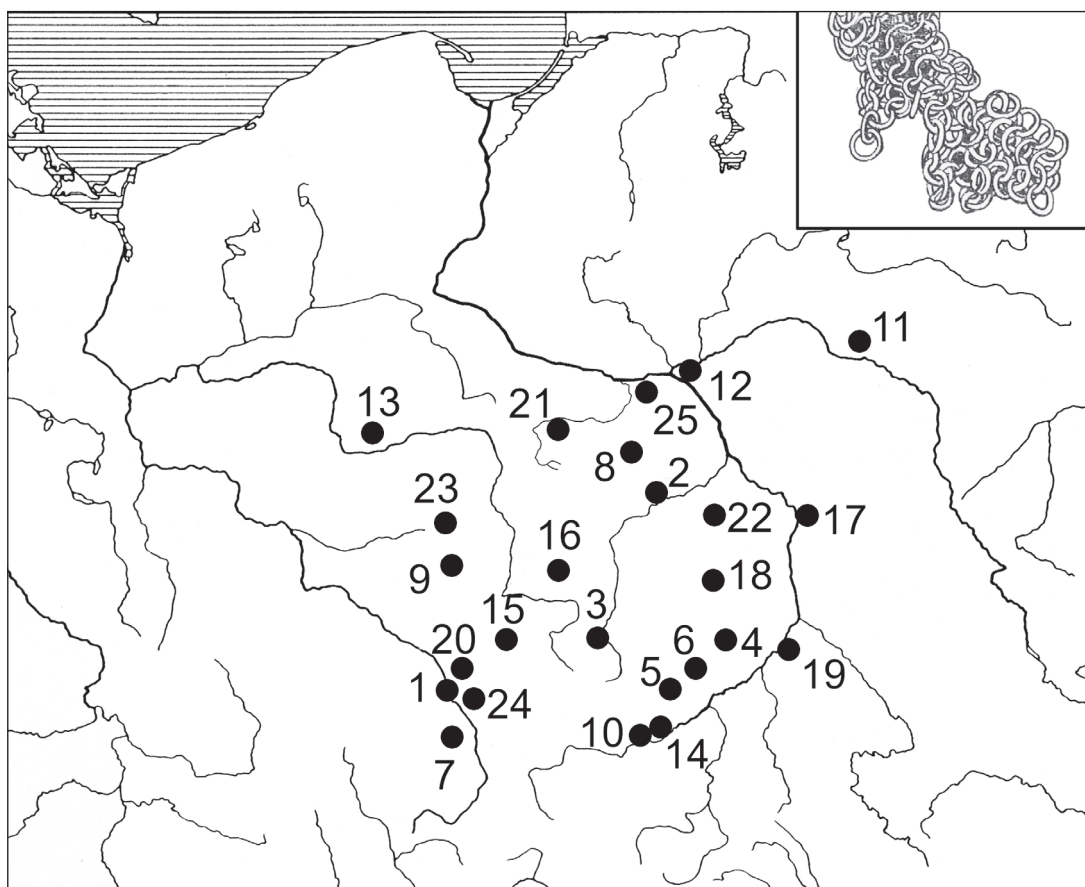


Fig. 5. Distribution of lorica hamata fragments from the Przeworsk culture. 1. Chorula, distr. Krapkowice, grave 14 (SZYDŁOWSKI 1964a, 27 Fig. 14/4); 2. Cieblowice Duże, distr. Tomaszów Mazowiecki, grave 1 (DZIĘGIELEWSKA/KULCZYŃSKA 2008, 11–12, Pl. I/1); 3. Drochlin, distr. Częstochowa, graves: 3, 100, 207 (KACZANOWSKI 1987, 10, 23, 38, 49, Pls. II/11–12, XI/8–11, XX/6); 4. Grzybów, distr. Staszów, loose find from cemetery (GARBACZ 2000, 87–88, Pl. LX/17); 5. Jakuszowice, distr. Kazimierza Wielka, loose find from cemetery (GODŁOWSKI 1986, Fig. 7/17); 6. Kawczyce, distr. Busko, loose finde (KACZANOWSKI/POLESKI 1985, 124 Fig. 11/10); 7. Kietrz, distr. Głubczyce, grób 1563 (GEDL 1976, Pl. 229/3); 8. Komorów, distr. Skierniewice, loose find (WAWRZENIECKI 1908, 62, Pl. XXIV/11); 9. Krajanka, distr. Wieruszów, loose find (ABRAMEK/KASZEWSKI 1973, 88, Pl. VI/21); 10. Kraków–Nowa Huta Mogiła, znalezisko luźne (KACZANOWSKI 1992, 94); 11. Krupice, distr. Siemiatycze, grave 208 (JASKANIS 2005, 53–54, Pl. LX); 12. Łajski, distr. Legionowo, graves: 3, 81 (KACZANOWSKI 1992, 94); 13. Młodzikowo, distr. Środa Wielkopolska, grave 57 and loose findznalezisko luźne (DYMACZEWSKI 1958, 227–228, Fig. 102/3; 403 Fig. 474/15); 14. Nowa Huta–Pleszów, distr. Kraków, loose find from settlement (KONTNY 2019, 39); 15. Opatów, distr. Kłobuck, graves: 49, 147, 826, 890 (GODŁOWSKI 1960); 16. Piaski, distr. Bełchatów, grób 95 (HORBACZ/OLĘDZKI 1983, Pl. 307/7); 17. Puławy–Włostowice, grave (KACZANOWSKI 1992, 95); 18. Starachowice, graves: IV and V (JAMKA 1959, 38 Fig. 14/f); 19. Świećca, distr. Tarnobrzeg, grób (KACZANOWSKI 1992, 95); 20. Tarnów, distr. Opole, grave 29/1936 (GODŁOWSKI/SZADKOWSKA 1972, 32, Pl. XXI. 9); 21. Witaszewice, distr. Łęczyca, grave 22 (TYSZLER 2022, 308–309, Fig. 4); 22. Wólka Domaniowska, distr. Radom, grave 33 (OLĘDZKI 2000, 15, Pl. XXXVI/4); 23. Zadowice, distr. Kalisz, grave 67 (KASZEWSKA 2023, 29–30, Pl. 42/7); 24. Zakrzów, distr. Krapkowice, graves: 17, 28 (SZYDŁOWSKI 1964b, 198, 202, Fig. 39a, ryc. 56a); 25. Żdźarów, distr. Sochaczew, loose find from cemetery (NOWAKOWSKI 2003, 376, Pl. LV/84).

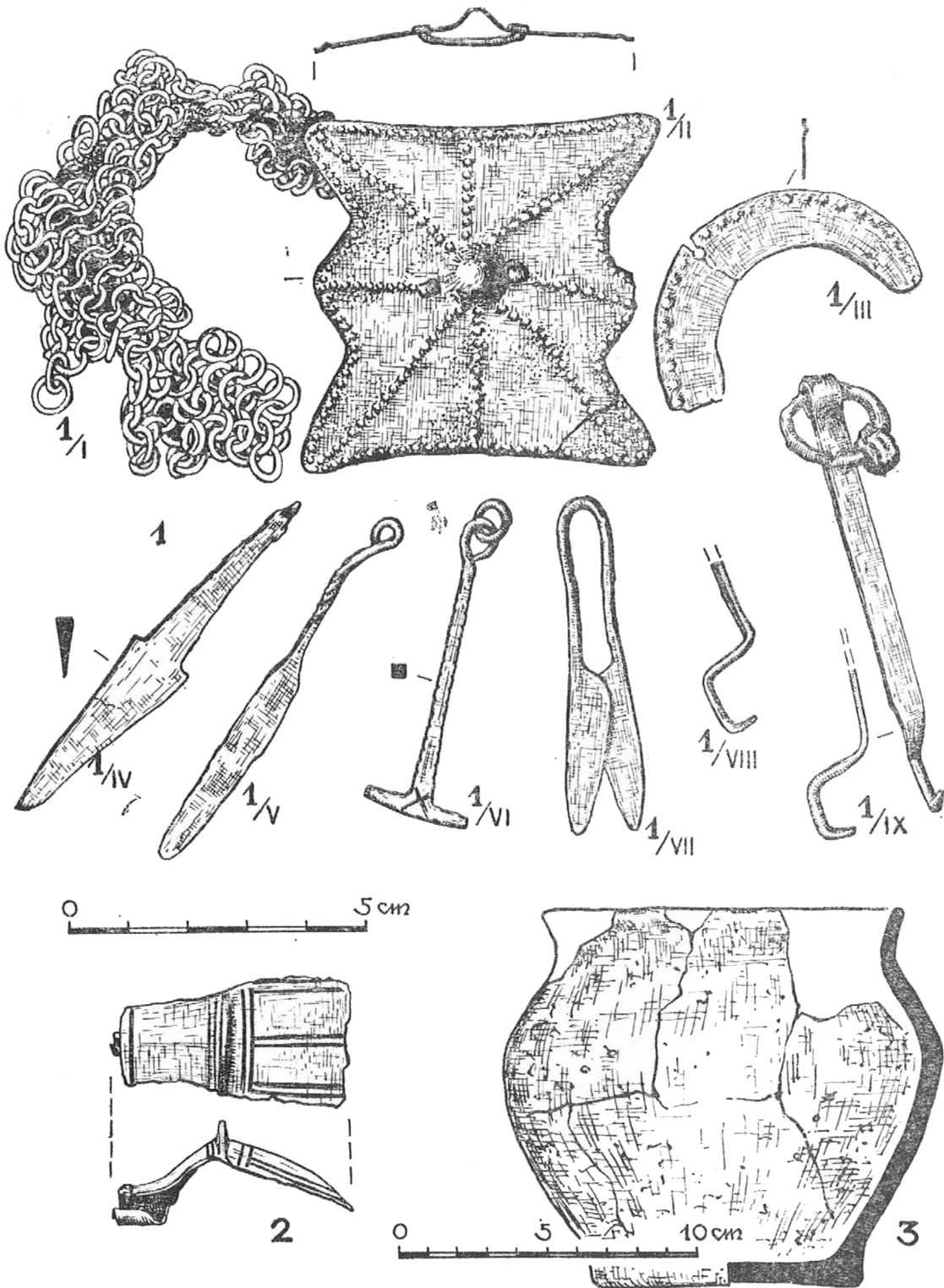


Fig. 6. Contents of the grave 49 from Opatów cemetery (according to GODŁOWSKI 1960).

Voivodeship, graves 3 and 81, in the “Eastern Przeworsk zone”¹⁰⁰. This region was undergoing a cultural transition from Przeworsk to Wielbark during this period. The grave assemblages mentioned, confidently dated to subphase B2c, are therefore among the last within the listed cemeteries to represent the retreating population of the Przeworsk culture¹⁰¹. These finds suggest that the chain mail fragments were interred in the late 60s or early 70s of the 2nd century, meaning they must have been acquired before then. Thus, the year 168 – a significant date for the Vandals/Victovali – remains plausible for these acquisitions. An analogous date is suggested for the burial of a warrior, complete with his chain mail, in the already mentioned Witaszewice, grave 22, a site described by Dr. Lubomira Tyszler as a “chieftain’s” or “princely” burial due to the wealth and quality of its furnishings¹⁰². This grave’s unique character underscores its significance. Other richly furnished burials, including those from Młodzikowo, grave 57¹⁰³, Kietrz, grave 1563¹⁰⁴, and especially Drochlin, objects 3 and 207¹⁰⁵, appear to date slightly later. These graves may represent the late return of Victovali warriors involved in the Marcomannic Wars, likely in the early 3rd century.

Conclusion

In light of the evidence presented, the involvement of Przeworsk and Wielbark cultural groups in the Marcomannic Wars appears to be a well-substantiated conclusion. Of these groups, the Przeworsk culture, likely associated with the Vandals/Victovali referenced in historical sources, seems to have shown greater engagement in these conflicts. Meanwhile, groups from the Wielbark culture, whose presence is also evident in regions affected by the wars, likely correspond to the so-called “*superiores barbari*”. This group was likely diverse, though it predominantly comprised tribes from Pomerania and northern Greater Poland, excluding the Goths, who were then settling in the former “Eastern Przeworsk Zone”, encompassing Mazovia, Podlasie, and northern Lublin Region.

The return of Przeworsk participants who survived the Danube conflicts occurred at different times, ultimately no later than the early third century (see above). This is evidenced by burials containing items seized from the Romans, dispersed widely across the Przeworsk area and minimally within the Wielbark cultural zone (see Roman legionary fibulae). This discrepancy can likely be attributed to the Wielbark burial customs, which typically excluded weapons and most iron items – namely, the trophies taken from the Romans.

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¹⁰⁰ ANDRZEJOWSKI 1989, 107.

¹⁰¹ The richly furnished warrior’s grave No. 106 from Krupice should indeed be counted among those dated to this period (JASKANIS 2005, 32 Pl. XXIX). Notably, while this grave did not contain chain mail fragments, it did include a well-preserved *Ringknaufschwert*.

¹⁰² TYSZLER 2022, 302–311, 314.

¹⁰³ DYMACZEWSKI 1958, 227–228, Fig. 102.

¹⁰⁴ GEDL 1976, Pl. 229/3.

¹⁰⁵ KACZANOWSKI 1980, 9–10, 38, Pls. II and XX.

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