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**FINDS OF PURSE FASTENINGS FROM THE IRON AGE
'CENTRAL PLACE' AT GAŃKI-WIERZBICZANY IN KUYAVIA
(CENTRAL POLAND)**

ABSTRACT

B. Kontny, M. Rudnicki 2016. *Finds of Purse Fastenings from the Iron Age 'Central Place' at GaŃki-Wierzbiczany in Kuyavia (Central Poland)*, AAC 51: 307–318.

Recent discoveries from the Kuyavia region provided a number of finds that change our perception of the continuity of inhabitation in the Kuyavia area after the disappearance of the Przeworsk culture settlement structures related to the Pre-Roman and Roman Periods. The settlement in Kuyavia existed also during the Migration Period at least until the 7th c. The settlement complex in GaŃki-Wierzbiczany, from which the belt purse fastenings presented in the following paper came, seems to be of particular importance. The fastenings are dated to the 2nd half of the 4th and the beginnings of the 5th c., i.e., the decline of the Late Roman Period and the onset of the Migration Period. Until recently, they were known from the areas neighbouring the Roman Empire boundary — limes — and from Roman military camps in Rhaetia. Currently, their list significantly extended, and the range of their occurrence expanded and includes the east Germany and Bohemia. At the same time the finds from Kuyavia (most likely made on-the-spot) are among specimens located furthest to the east. It seems that these unique finds of purse fastenings from the south-eastern and eastern peripheries of Europe might be explained through the existence of a cultural centre in Kuyavia that facilitated the propagation of western cultural patterns, in this case related to outfit of warriors.

Key words: Roman Period; Migration Period; Kuyavia; Przeworsk Culture

Received: 31.10.2016; Revised: 23.12.2016; Revised: 27.12.2016; Accepted: 30.12.2016

INTRODUCTION

This paper is the first of a series of planned publications about the Iron Age at GaŃki-Wierzbiczany (Central Poland).¹ The issue is very topical because for a certain time information about a huge number of discoveries made in that area by prospectors-hobbyists using metal detectors has been reaching the archaeologists and numismatists. Such activities are today a common phenomenon both in Poland and in the other European countries. The legal provisions concerning the discoveries of historical artefacts valid in Poland today are not consistent and often flawed and thus do not

¹ The article was prepared with the financial support of the National Science Centre (Maestro project: *Migration Period between Odra and Vistula*, led by Prof. A. Bursche from the Institute of Archaeology, University of Warsaw, No. DEC-2011/02/A/HS3/00389).

protect the archaeological heritage from destruction. The strict legal regulations are ineffective as they are not accepted by the population. As a result the State has no control over the ancient artefacts discovered more or less accidentally in the Polish lands. This results in irreparable losses for science as it makes it difficult or even completely impossible for the archaeologists and numismatists to obtain information about many of the finds. Meanwhile, many of these discoveries substantially change the image of the settlement and culture between the Oder and Vistula rivers in the prehistoric times. This concerns, i.a., the stray finds from Kuyavia, especially from the neighbouring villages of Gąski and Wierzbiczany, powiat Inowrocław.

The villages, located in the northern part of central Kuyavia, are ca. 24 km away from the Vistula as the crow flies. The area is part of the Inowrocław Plain, which is a flat morainic plateau. The land inclination and low natural drainage contribute to the excessive soil moisture, as a result of which the area has black marshy soils with a humus layer up to several ten centimetres thick. The excessive cultivation of the fertile soils resulted in almost complete deforestation. The area of Gąski and Wierzbiczany, like most of the investigated mesoregion, is slightly rolling, cut across with small watercourses and remains of small ponds, often having no outflow.

It will be never possible to compile a detailed list of the finds made in the area of Gąski and Wierzbiczany but the available data are impressive. They indicate that the settlement complex situated within the discussed villages is one of the most important points on the map of the European *Barbaricum*. It may be hypothetically estimated that during the several, or several ten, recent years, more than a dozen thousand of metal artefacts of different cultural provenience have been found at a relatively small area. The bulk of the collection can be dated to between Phase A1 of the Late Pre-Roman Period and the Migration Period. Probably during all that time a settlement complex playing an exceptional role in the settlement structures of the Przeworsk culture existed within the boundaries of modern Gąski and Wierzbiczany, which survived also after the discontinuation of this cultural unit. This supposition is based on the wealth of the stray finds collected in the fields in this area, which are mainly artefacts made of copper alloys but also of silver and gold. These are brooches and other artefacts, mainly ornaments and parts of costume, including many imports, as well as several hundred (400?) Celtic coins and several thousand of Roman coins.

Gąski is well known in the archaeological literature. One of the sites from the settlement complex, Gąski, Site No. 18, was discovered in 1972 during the field survey conducted by the Institute of Prehistory at Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań (Andrałojć, Andrałojć 2012, 8). In 1984–1991 the south-western part of the site was excavated under the guidance of A. Cofta-Broniewska. The majority of the finds from these excavations are said to be related to the Przeworsk culture settlement.

In the Pre-Roman Period and the Early Roman Period the hill marked as site No. 18 was used as a necropolis. Like at many other cemeteries recorded in the neighbourhood of Inowrocław, besides the cremation burials there were some inhumation graves. In the Younger Roman Period a settlement was established

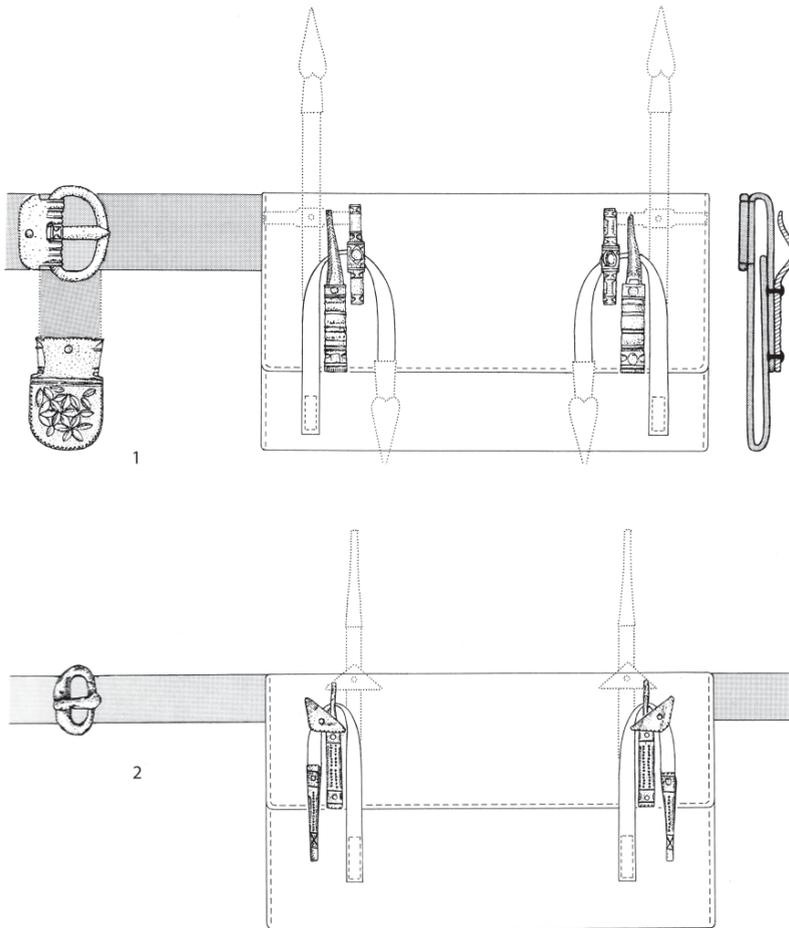


Fig. 1. Closing mechanism of hip purses; after M. Schulze (1982, Fig. 3–4); computer design B. Kontny.

at the same place, of which 4 semi-recessed dugouts, 19 storage pits and 34 post holes have been recorded. The rich collection of artefacts, including 20 fragments of imported glass vessels and several ten lumps of raw amber testified to the considerable affluence of the inhabitants. The finds from a house recorded as Feature No. 104 dated by the researchers to the 4th century indicated that this was a place where raw material was locally processed. In the corner of the feature a deposit of 140 Roman denarii was discovered, which were, according to the researchers, minted between the 2nd half of the 2nd c. and the early 3rd c. These materials have not been analysed or published till today and all the information about them can be found only in short excavation reports (*cf.* Cofta-Broniewska 1985, 21, 83; 1986, 78–79; 1987, 76; 1988, 114–115; 1993, 201–224; Cofta-Broniewska, Stolpiak, Andrałojć 1992, 71; 1993, 9–10).

After a field survey conducted according to the principles of the Archaeological Record of Poland in 2006 the surface of site No. 18 was extended to 8 hectares. Soon afterwards (?) a field survey with the use of metal detectors was carried out there under the guidance of Józef Bednarczyk. It yielded “[...] several hundred metal artefacts, mainly from the Roman Period but also Celtic products, including coins” (Andrałojć, Andrałojć 2012, 8ff.). Up till today one Celtic coin, a bronze applied decoration difficult to date, and one zoomorphic pendant, probably from the Roman Period from this collection have been published (Andrałojć, Andrałojć 2012, 10ff., Fig. 8–9; Andrałojć, Andrałojć 2014, 41, Fig. 11). Thus, paradoxically our knowledge about the Iron Age settlement in Gąski is based on the materials obtained by the hobbyists rather than archaeologists, for the latter ones have not been made available for the academic milieu.

However, it is not the huge number of the artefacts that is the most important argument in the interpretation of the settlement of the investigated region of Kuyavia but rather the finds confirming the high advancement of the local crafts, starting from the Pre-Roman Period, through the Roman Period up to the Migration Period. The most spectacular example of such activeness are the artefacts connected with the Celtic mint. In this context the large collection of artefacts, not only coins, confirming the multi-pronged and far-reaching connections of the people inhabiting or perhaps visiting the Gąski and Wierzbiczany settlement complex, is particularly important, especially for the Younger and Late Roman Period and the Migration Period. Most probably this was the so-called ‘central place’ comparable to Sorte Muld in Bornholm, Gudme on Funen (*cf.* Adamsen *et al.* [eds.] 2009) or Friested in central Germany (Schmidt 2012). However, the huge variety of the finds together with the underrepresentation of brooches Type Almgren 158 in comparison to Type Almgren 162 make one wonder if the population of the central place in Gąski-Wierzbiczany was typical of the Przeworsk culture.

A relatively large group of the artefacts discovered at the discussed area is made of items of ‘exotic’ character, earlier not recorded in the Polish lands. They include three fittings made of copper alloy. Despite some differences in size, proportions, construction details, and decoration, their forms are in principle very similar. They have a wider quadrangular part with two rivets at the bottom, which were used for fastening it. It is extended by a wire-like handle flattened at the base and bent upwards. Except for the smallest, very simple in form and undecorated fitting made of a bronze plate (Cat. No. 3), the two other ones were executed in a very similar style. The fastening is divided into three parts: the central one with slanting edges and the side ones to which the rivets are attached. The side elements have the shape of quadrangular metopes decorated with incisions on the edges and horizontal grooves on the surface. Such metopes are typical of other artefacts, mainly the feet of the brooches from the end of the Roman Period, such as Type Almgren 158, Variants Radłowice-Żabieniec, Ojców, Jakuszowice and Pożdżeń or Almgren 162, i.e. from the Phase C2 until D1 (see Jakubczyk 2014, Fig. 4, Pl. XVII:3, XVIII:3, 6, XIX:1, 3–5, XX:2, XXX:1–3, XXXII:4). In both these fittings the edge parts of the metopes were decorated with double grooves. Similar grooves are also on the

ends of both handles. Purse fastenings were probably made locally as the casting mould to produce them was found at settlement complex in Gąski-Wierzbiczany.

The fittings analogous to the findings from Kuyavia discussed here were first noticed by M. Schulze (1982).² Analysing the grave goods from inhumation burials in Scheßlitz, Landkreis Bamberg, and Kleinlangheim, Landkreis Kitzingen, Grave No. 144, both in Bayern, she rightly concluded that these artefacts were fastened with rivets to the flaps of the hip purses. The purses were attached to a leather belt fastened with a buckle. They were used to store fire ignition sets: iron bar-shaped fire steels with pieces of flint, small knives, etc. (Schulze 1982, Figs. 1–2). Such fittings were found in pairs and were parts of the purse fastenings. In order to hold the flap, a strap was passed under the bow-shaped part of the fitting, which was sewn to the bottom part of the purse. To prevent its loosening or sliding out the tapering end of the fitting was held fast with the second indispensable part of the fitting: a decorative pawl (Fig. 1).

The finds from Gąski-Wierzbiczany included three artefacts of that kind made of copper alloy. They differ in shape, size, and decorations. All of them are elongated in shape and have a single rivet in the central part. It was used to attach the pawl to the flap of the purse at the same time allowing to turn the pawl. They were fixed next to the handles of the bow-shaped fittings. Thanks to that the bar-shaped pawl turning around the axis formed by the rivet allowed, keeping appropriate distance, to close the flap. Such a solution was found in Kleinlangheim (Schulze 1982, Fig. 3). Another method was recorded in Scheßlitz where the top of the elongated part of the fastening was fastened by turning the pawl in the shape of an isosceles triangle with a centrally placed rivet. In this case the ends of the straps were weighted with elongated decorative fittings made from copper alloy (Schulze 1982, Fig. 4).

Among the finds from Gąski-Wierzbiczany three pawls for fastening the strap have been found. One of them resembles that from Kleinlangheim. Despite the differences in shape the discussed pawls were made in a very similar style. In two of them (Cat. No. 4 and 5) the central part is decorated with grooves resembling the metopes found on the fastenings discussed above. In both cases the arms have oblique edges, similarly to the central parts of the fastenings. The third pawl differs in its shape (Cat. No. 6), but also this one can be assigned to the same stylistic group. Taking into account that it is made of three parts and also the shape of its respective elements, including the metopes at the edges, this artefact strongly resembles the elements fixing the fastenings. Almost identical item with the propeller one was found at Crimean cemetery at Luchistoe near Alushta, grave No. 211 (Ajbabın, Chajredinova 2009, Fig. 27:10), i.e., together with a more slender parallel with semi-circular endings; another analogy from the Chernaya Rechka, Balaklava rajon necropolis, vault grave No. 5/1988 (Ajbabın 2011, Fig. 21:27, 29), also at the Crimean Peninsula (Ukraine). Their chronology set to the early 6th c. seems to be too late.

² Further on the problem was dealt with Ch. Pescheck (1986), J. Schuster (2001, 66–70, Fig. 4), J. Bemann (2007, 249, Fig. 2, List 3) and once again J. Schuster (2017).

CATALOGUE OF THE FINDS

1. Fitting cast from copper alloy in a two-part form; the fastening is 30.8 mm long and 4.7 mm wide; the endings are shaped into profiled metopes delimited with transverse grooves (double grooves on the metope at the end) with edges between them cut at the angle of 45 degrees; at the bottom there is a visible trace of the casting seam; the rivets are composite; the hook made of tapering wire is decorated at the end with horizontal grooves; total length: 50.9 mm (Fig. 2:1; 3:1);
2. Fitting made from 1.8 mm thick sheet of copper alloy; the fastening part is 23.6 mm long and 6.2 mm wide; the endings shaped into profiled metopes are delimited with horizontal grooves (double on the metope at the end); the metal sheet between the is profiled, trapeze-shaped in cross-section; the rivets are separate; the hook made of 3.1 mm wide wire is decorated at the end with three horizontal grooves; total length: ca 52 mm (Fig. 2:2, 3:2);

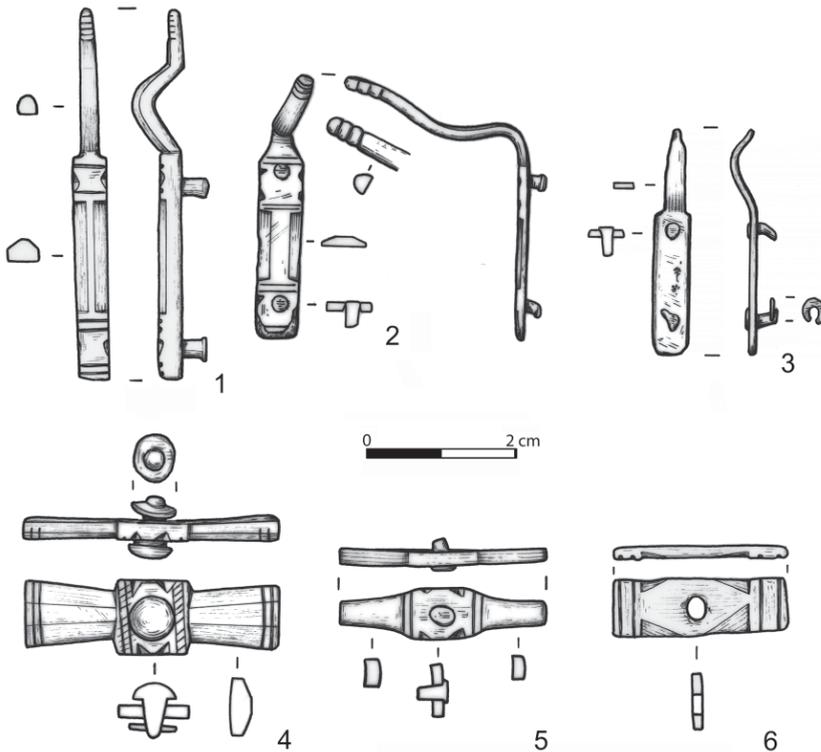


Fig. 2. Hip purse fittings found at Gaški-Wierzbiczany, powiat Inowrocław; drawn by E. Pazyna. 1-6 (Nos. acc. to the Catalogue).



Fig. 3. Hip purse fittings found at Gąski-Wierzbiczany, powiat Inowrocław; Photo by M. Bogacki. 1–6 (Nos. acc. to the Catalogue).

3. Fitting made of 1.2 mm thick copper alloy sheet; the fastening part is 19.6 mm long and 5.2 mm wide, undecorated; the rivets are separate; the hook is made from a tapering metal sheet; total length: 31.2 mm (Fig. 2:3, 3:3);
4. Bar-shaped pawl from copper alloy; the marked out central part in the form of a quadrangular metope is decorated with profiling at the edges and with engraved lines on the surface; in the centre there is a rivet with a hemispherical head and a preserved pad; the flaring side parts are decorated at the ends with two transverse grooves, profiled, trapeze-shaped in cross-section; total length of the pawl: 34.8 mm (Fig. 2:4, 3:4);
5. Bar-shaped pawl made of copper alloy; the marked out central part in the form of a quadrangle is profiled at the edges; in the centre there is a rivet with a flat head; the side parts are delimited by two transverse grooves, tapering, profiled, trapeze-shaped in cross-section; total length of the pawl: 28.5 mm (Fig. 2:5, 3:5);
6. Bar-shaped pawl made of copper alloy; with profiled edges; the ends in the form of metopes are decorated with transverse grooves; total length of the pawl: 23.8 mm (Fig. 2:6, 3:6).

DISCUSSION

Fittings similar to the discussed belt purses³ (Germ. *Gürteltaschebeschläge*) have been registered in Roman contexts, e.g., in the borderland *castellum* in Burghöfe a.d. Donau, Landkreis Donau-Ries, i.e., the Ancient *Submuntorium* in Rhetia (Pröttel 2002, Pl. 7:96). For that reason some researchers were inclined to consider them as fastenings of the Roman belt purses. However, as the concentration of such finds is greater in Barbaricum it seems more justified to assume that this was a Germanic, Elbe region or Alamannic idea, introduced to the Roman camps by the German mercenaries (see Pröttel 2002, 119–120, Fig. 6). This opinion is shared by J. Tejral who considered the assemblages from Scheßlitz, Kleinlangheim as well as from the rich grave from Beroun-Závodí, okres Beroun in the Czech Republic (see Droberjar, John 2014, 216, Fig. 6) as typical of the burials of German military leaders (*principes*) living in ca 400 A.D., i.e., a generation before the chiefs wearing belts decorated with the use of the *Kerbschnitt* technique (Tejral 1999a, 217; 1999b, 241, Fig. 14–15).

The above list can be substantially extended. During the preparation of this paper we obtained new information about another bag fastening from the Polish lands (Fig. 4). Its photo was uploaded to the portal Odkrywca.pl (date of access:

³ Only the longer fittings, easier to determine, are mentioned.



Fig. 4. Finds from the vicinity of Plock, powiat Plock including the hip purse fastening; after Odkrywca.pl (date of access: 12.12.2016).

12.12.2016) together with the information that it was found with several other artefacts in a field near Płock. Their dating indicates that the interesting us find comes from a settlement used, i.a., in the Late Roman Period and Early Migration Period. Even though only a poor quality photo of the fitting from the vicinity of Płock is available, it is possible to see that it resembles very strongly the cast artefact from Gąski-Wierzbiczany (Cat. No. 1) both as regards its dimensions and technology. It differs in its decorations, which probably refer to the style of caterpillar brooches (Germ. *Raupenfibeln*; see Tuszyńska 1988).

At the current stage of research one may say that the finds of the analysed fastenings were made mainly in the upper Danube catchment area (in the Barbaricum but also from some limes Roman camps), on the upper Main, and between the central and upper Weser and Elbe (Fig. 5). A single item is known from eastern Germany and a cluster of them was registered in the Bohemian Basin (Schuster 2001; Droberjar 2015, Fig. 15). The eastern- and south-easternmost find comprises the six specimens from Žehuň, okres Kolín, Přešt'ovice, okres Strakonice (Droberjar 2015, 723, Fig. 14), and Beroun-Zavodi, okres Beroun (Droberjar 2015, 724). In the last-mentioned place another rectangular

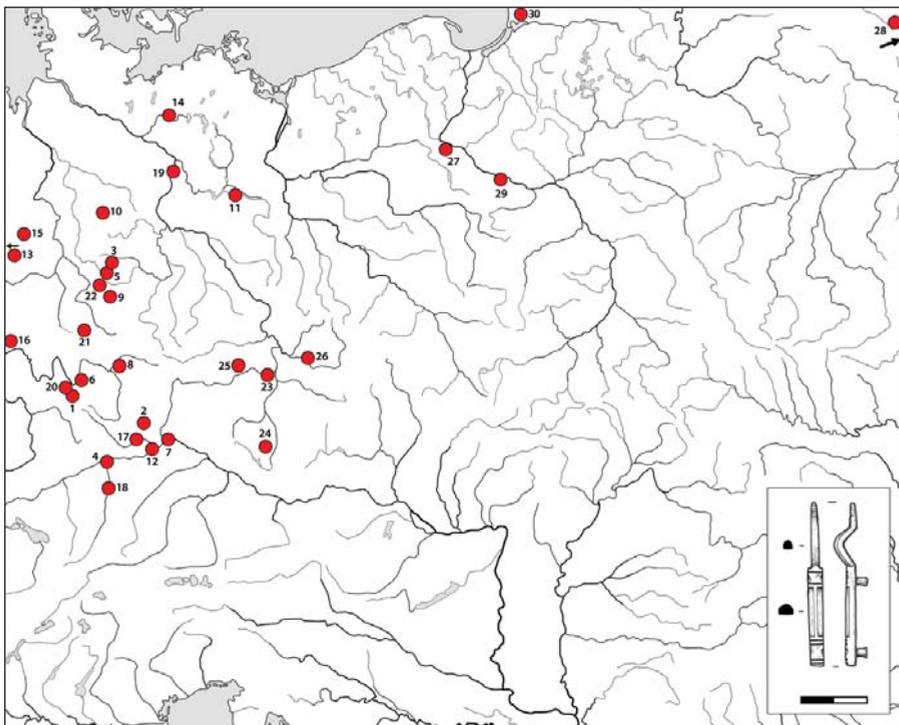


Fig. 5. Distribution of the hip purses' fastenings and pawls; drawn by B. Kontny.

Nos. 1 – 26 acc. to Schuster 2017, supplemented by the authors; No. 27 – Gąski-Wierzbiczany, powiat Inowrocław, Poland; No. 28 – Koshibevo, Ryazan oblast, Russia; No. 29 – vicinity of Płock; powiat Płock, Poland; No. 30 – Rovnoe, ray. Zelenogradsk (ex-Polwitten, Kr. Fischhausen), grave 33.

fitting without a waist was discovered, which was erroneously determined as a belt fitting (Droberjar 2015, 712, 720, Fig. 4:8), but this is contradicted by the presence of only one, central, rivet, which was insufficient to fix a fitting securely to the belt. Most probably this was part of a fastening analogous to that from Gaški-Wierzbiczyany (Cat. No. 6). The farthest to the east and so far completely isolated specimen was found at Koshibevo, Sasovo rajon, Ryazan oblast in the Ryazan-Oka Finns culture (Schuster 2017; see Akhmedov 2007, Fig. 10).⁴

The discussed artefacts can be dated to Phase C₃ and the early Phase D₁, i.e., the 2nd half of the 4th and the early 5th c. (Schulze 1982, 504–505; Schuster 2001, 66; Walther 1998, 28–29).

The finds of the described fittings (determined by Droberjar as Type Scheßlitz-Kleinlangheim) made so far to the east were considered to be a result of the arrival of various ethnic groups from the west to the settlement concentration in Bohemia; other indications of multi-cultural influences, i.e., of the Chernihiv, Przeworsk, or even Balt cultures have been noted there (Droberjar 2015, 725). The last-mentioned conclusion, however, is erroneous because it is based on the analysis of the beak-shaped strap ends which are found in the Przeworsk and Wielbark cultures, in the Dębczyno group and, in single cases, even in Scandinavia and the Elbe Land (Cieśliński, Hoffmann, Sobieraj 2015, Fig. 2 [with further literature]), and not only in the Balt milieu. Droberjar believed that this was the outcome of the Germans' migrations who were coming to their homelands from faraway places (Droberjar 2015, 724).

It seems obvious that such an evident concentration of the discussed fittings in the Kuyavian settlement complex in Gaški-Wierzbiczyany should be associated with the exceptional importance that region had at the end of the Antiquity. The described hip-bag fastenings confirm the intensive, multi-pronged contacts of these lands in that period. Similarly, the find from the neighbourhood of Płock is one of the proofs that a long-distance north-south trade route ran along the Vistula in the late 4th and early 5th c.

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⁴ In between there is a find from Rovnoe (ex-Polwitten), grave 33 in the Dollkeim-Kovrovo culture (Jakobson heritage); we would like to thank A. Wiśniewska for paying our attention to that item.

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