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THE IMAGE OF LOKI FROM PROOSA IN ESTONIA: A MIGRATION PERIOD HIGH STATUS BUCKLE WITH AN ELEVATED CIRCULAR FASTENING PLATE IN THE LIGHT OF SIMILAR BUCKLES RECOVERED IN SCANDINAVIA

Abstract

The purpose of this article is to examine an extraordinary Migration Period high status buckle recovered in a cemetery at Proosa, in the close proximity of the Estonian capital Tallinn. Within the cemetery the buckle belongs to a group of objects which all are decorated with animal art of Salin's style I. With regard to the ornamentation this group has been linked to the material culture in the lake Mälaren area and on the island of Gotland. The buckle has never previously been published with detailed drawings of good quality and its place within the Scandinavian Migration Period art has only briefly been discussed by Birgit Arrhenius in an account from 1979. The aim of this study is to complement Arrhenius rendering by examining how the Proosa buckle relates – from a morphological and chronological point of view – to the few other known high status buckles of similar type recovered in Scandinavia. Of importance is Wencke Slomanns account of the closely related buckle from grave V at Snartemo. Furthermore, possible influences from the continental high status buckles will be investigated as well. The author defines a high status buckle as a buckle made of gold or silver or a highly ornate copper-alloy buckle. Apart from giving a general survey of the Proosa buckle and its morphological relatives, some of the features on these buckles which are likely to be endowed with highly symbolic meaning will also be discussed. These include the human head termination on the tongue of the Proosa buckle and the four legged animal on the tongue of the Snartemo buckle. The former feature can possibly be interpreted as a rendering of Loki, the god or giant from Old Norse mythology.

Keywords: Migration Period, buckles, shapes, ornamentation, symbolism, trickster

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DEFINING THE PROOSA GROUP

The cemetery at Proosa is located near the village Saha-Loo in the northern part of Estonia. It has been examined in a series of excavations from 1970–1984, which have shown that it was in use from the Roman Iron Age up to the 13th century AD. In excavations taking place from 1971–77 a once silvered copper-alloy buckle (Fig. 1) and 22 other high status objects, all dating to the latter part of the Migration Period, were recovered in a 450 m² tarand grave with cremation burials. 16 of the objects were clasp buttons with ornaments executed in chip carving. The buckle and most

of the other objects can likely be connected to sword, scabbard and baldric. Almost all of the 23 objects in question are decorated with animal art of Salin's style I (Salin 1904: 214–45), which may suggest a connection with Scandinavia (Selirand & Deemant 1985).

If the distinct overall shape of the buckle is taken into consideration, it becomes clear that it can be linked to a small number of similar high status buckles recovered in Scandinavia. The aim of this paper is to examine how these buckles relate to each other with regard to morphology and chronology. The buckle from Proosa is considered to be the youngest in the group, thus

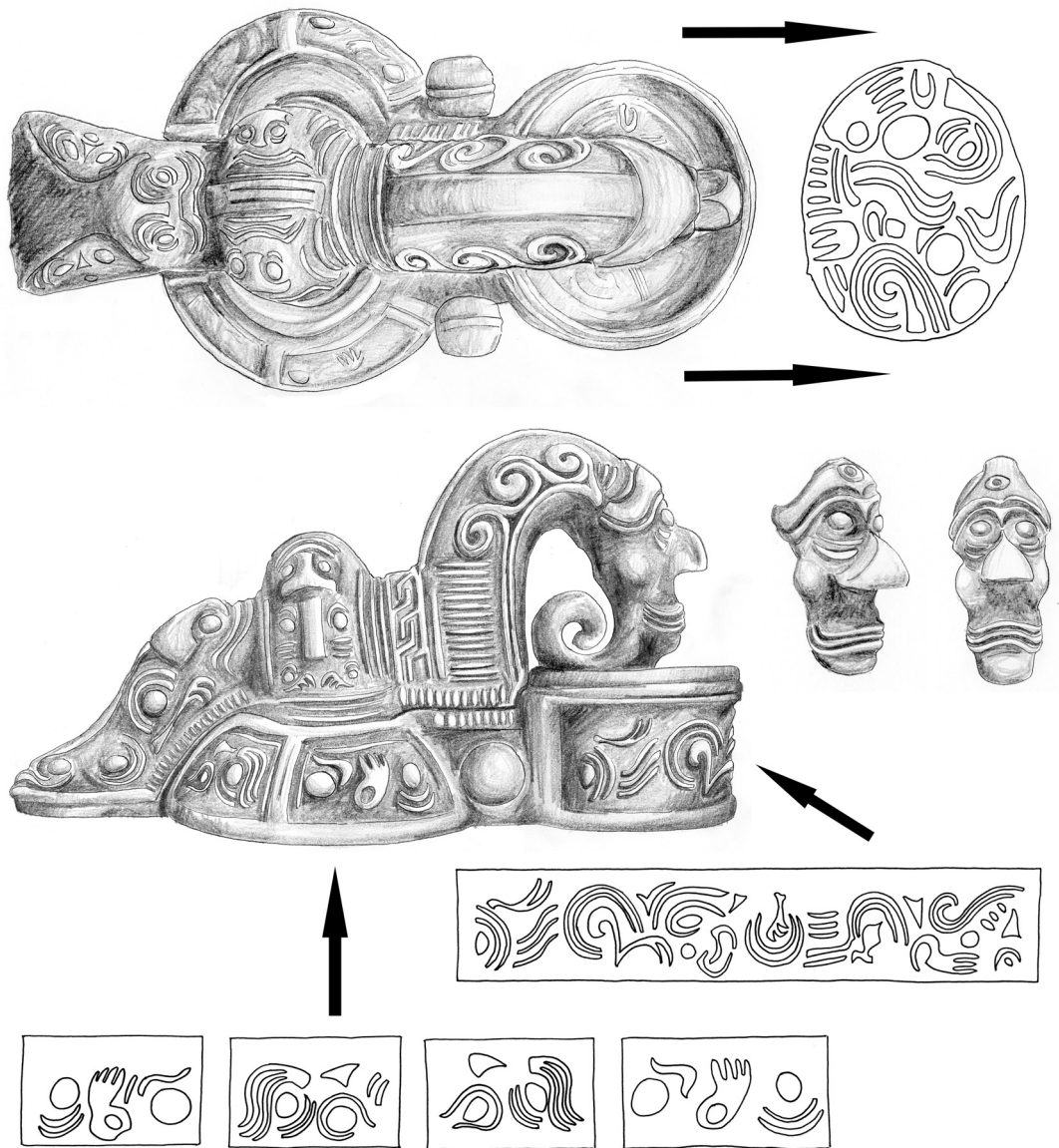


Fig. 1. Copper-alloy buckle with traces of silver from the cemetery at Proosa in Estonia. Length 60 mm. Drawing by Magnus Odéen.

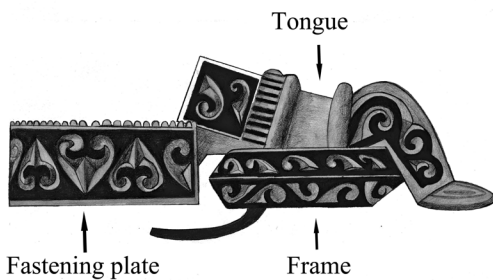


Fig. 2. The components of a buckle illustrated with one of the gilded silver buckles from the hoard recovered near Sjörup in Häglinge parish in Sweden. Length 70 mm. Drawing by the author.

it becomes a suitable point of departure for the study.

The article is divided into four chapters. The first chapter defines the morphological characteristics for the Proosa buckle and its parallels – the Proosa group. The second chapter discusses possible influences for the overall shape of the buckles in the group. The third chapter gives a description of the ornamentation of the Proosa buckle and its relatives. Some of the features likely to be endowed with a highly symbolic meaning will be given a more thorough analysis. The disposition of the third chapter is ordered after the parts that constitute a buckle (Fig. 2). The fourth and last chapter is a summary of the conclusions of this study.

Morphological characterization and function

The shapes of the tongue, frame and fastening plate taken together constitute the overall shape of a buckle (Fig. 2). This will serve as a basis for the following morphological characterization. A suitable starting point when dealing with the overall shape of the Proosa buckle is Wencke Slomann's study (1979) of the buckle from the exceptionally rich grave V at Snartemo in the county of Vest-Agder in Norway (Fig. 3). As the most important parallel to this buckle Slomann presents the buckles from a hoard recovered near Sjörup in the southern part of Sweden (Fig. 2). Altogether the Sjörup-find consisted of parts from four different buckles which all are morphologically close to the Snartemo buckle (Salin 1894).

Apart from the mentioned Sjörup buckles, Slomann also discusses three other buckles as parallels to the Snartemo buckle. These are: a buckle from the war booty sacrifice Nydam II (Fig. 4:1; Kjaer 1905: 189), a buckle of unknown provenance from Denmark (Fig. 5:1; Müller 1880: 156) and a buckle from the war booty sacrifice at Ejsbøl (Fig. 12:1; Ørnes 1988: Taf. 57–9). According to Slomann the morphological characteristic these buckles have in common is the elevation of their fastening plates. However, in the author's opinion the rhombic and octagonal fastening plates of the Nydam II and Ejsbøl buckles clearly separates them from the Snartemo buckle which has a circular fastening plate. Furthermore, the Nydam II buckle also lacks the sunken interior of the fastening plate



Fig. 3. Buckle of gilded silver from grave V at Snartemo in the county of Vest-Agder in Norway. Length 85 mm. Drawing by the author.

which is a prominent feature on the Snartemo buckle. A closer parallel to the Nydam II buckle can instead be found in a buckle from Kertch in the eastern Crimea (Fig. 4:2). The buckle from Ejsbøl with an octagonal fastening plate will be discussed further in the chapter dealing with possible influences for the overall shape.

The elevated and circular fastening plate with a sunken interior is a feature which the Snartemo buckle has in common with the buckles from Sjörup (Fig. 2) and the buckle of unknown provenance from Denmark (Fig. 5:1), hence the author would like to designate them as buckles with an elevated circular fastening plate. Furthermore, it is possible to add three more buckles to this group – the mentioned buckle from Proosa (Fig. 1), a buckle from the war booty sacrifice at Finnestorp in Larv parish in Sweden (Fig. 5:2; Nordqvist 2007: 228) and a buckle from the war booty sacrifice at Nydam IV in Denmark (Fig. 5:3; Jörgensen & Vang Petersen 2003: 281). In this survey these buckles (Figs. 1–3, 5:1–3) will be referred to as the Proosa group (Fig. 6). With reference to the close

connection between the buckle and the sword in the Snartemo burial the Proosa group buckles are likely to have been part of the baldric.

Apart from the elevated circular fastening plate, the heavysset tongue and frame must be mentioned as characteristic features of the Proosa group. Furthermore, it can also be noted that the buckles are of similar size and, with exception for the once silvered copper-alloy buckle from Proosa, are all made of gilded silver. The contrasting effect of silver, gold and the black niello inlay must be regarded as somewhat of a leitmotif for these buckles. An identical contrasting effect can be seen on many of the contemporary high status buckles in the continental archaeological record. The only buckle which seems to lack niello inlay is the buckle from Proosa, however, it can't be ruled out that niello previously has been present but no longer survives. An alternate explanation may be that the later dating of the buckle suggests that ornamentations of this kind had gone out of fashion. Another deviating feature of the Proosa buckle is the remarkable height and volume of the tongue relation to the size of the fastening plate and frame. Also the shape of the tongue is more organic compared to the tongues of the other buckles in the Proosa group.

In this context a buckle-like object of gilded silver from Tjurkö in the southern part of Sweden (Fig. 5:4; Åberg 1953: 89) must be mentioned as well. The object, which unfortunately lacks a provenance, has an overall shape identical to the Proosa group buckles but is considerably smaller in size. It is also questionable whether the object constitutes a buckle, since a way of fastening a tongue piece seems to be lacking. However, it is possible that the birds' heads on the sides of the fastening plate might have secured a tongue. An almost identical but smaller object, recovered in an inhumation burial at Osendorf near Halle in Germany, has been classified as a supporter by Berthold Schmidt (1961: 137; 1975: 73). According to Schmidt (1961: 174) the supporter from Osendorf and the object from Tjurkö were made in the same Scandinavian workshop.

Two objects stemming from the Skedemosse bog on the island of Öland are interpreted by Ulf-Erik Hagberg (1967a: 75, 1967b: 45) as elevated and circular fastening plates of the same kind that can be seen on the Proosa group buckles. Hagberg's interpretation is supported by Andreas

Rau who is currently conducting research on the same buckle type, which he refers to as 'type Snartemo-Sjörup'. Furthermore, a fitting from a cremation burial at Sæbø in Norway (Shetelig 1912: Fig. 197) is also considered by Rau to have been a part of a type Snartemo-Sjörup buckle (Andreas Rau, pers. comm.).

Dating

With reference to the dissolved animal art of Salin's style I, Birgit Arrhenius (1974: 216) considers the Proosa buckle to be younger than the buckles from Sjörup and Snartemo. The latter two are looked upon as contemporary by many researchers (e.g., Åberg 1953: 88–90; Slomann 1979: 115; Menghin 1983: 30–1), belonging to the second half of the Migration Period (D2). The buckle of unknown provenance from Denmark (Fig. 5:1) is discussed by Olfert Voss (1954: 176–8) who relates it to the Nydam style which, according to Voss, appears around AD 400. A more precise dating of the buckle is not given. However, the author is prepared to look upon the buckle as roughly contemporary with the Nydam IV buckle (Fig. 5:3) due to the similar chip carving pattern within the sunken interior of the fastening plate. The Nydam IV buckle was considered to have been deposited in AD 450–475 (Jørgensen & Vang Petersen 2003: 281). However, with reference to the research of Andreas Rau on this find and the investigations conducted by Rasmus Iversen on the Kragehulfind, a more likely dating of the deposition is AD 470–480. Furthermore, due to its rather worn condition the Nydam buckle is likely to have been manufactured about AD 460 which is, based on comparisons of the weaponry, one generation earlier than the Snartemo buckle. (Andreas Rau, pers. comm.).

The buckle from Finnestorp (Fig. 5:2) has not yet been given a more precise dating in the archaeological literature. If the ornamentation on this buckle is taken into consideration it becomes quite clear that it deviates from the other buckles in the Proosa group, which might indicate a somewhat earlier dating. This circumstance will be investigated further in the chapter dealing with the ornamentation of the Proosa group buckles.

It can also be mentioned that the previously discussed buckle-like object from Tjurkö is

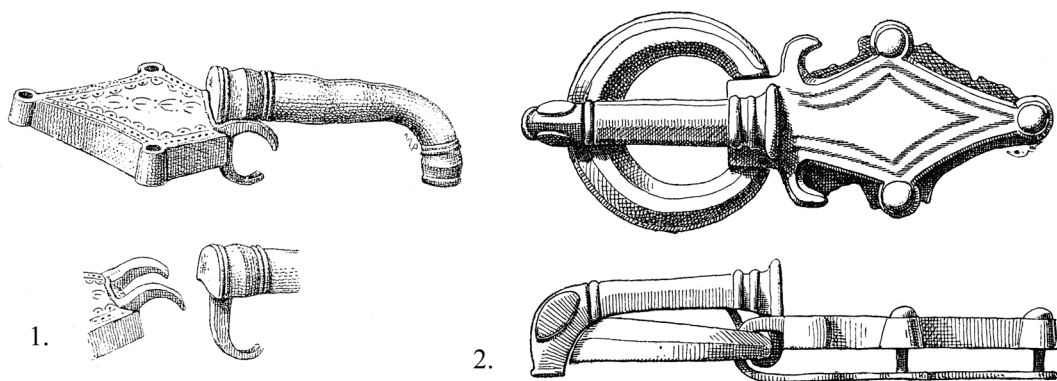


Fig. 4. 1. Buckle of gilded silver from the war booty sacrifice at Nydam II in Denmark. Length 58 mm. After Kjaer (1905: 189). 2. Buckle from Kertch in the eastern Crimea. Length 62 mm. After Salin (1904: 112).

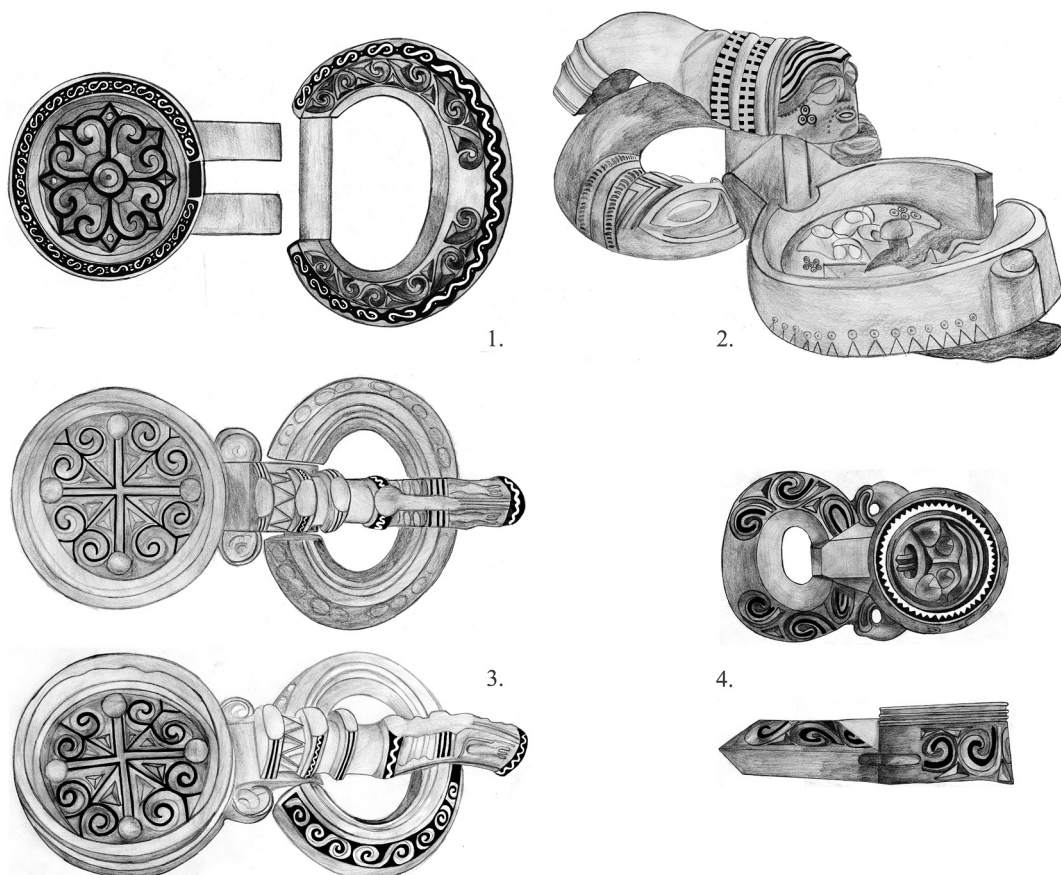


Fig. 5. 1. Buckle of gilded silver of unknown provenance from Denmark. Length 91 mm. 2. Buckle of gilded silver from the war booty sacrifice at Finnestorp in Larv parish in Sweden. 3. Buckle of gilded silver from the war booty sacrifice at Nydam IV in Denmark. Length 70 mm. 4. Buckle-like object of gilded silver from Tjurkö in Augerum parish in Sweden. Length 43 mm. All drawings by the author.



Fig. 6. Map showing the geographical provenance of five of the buckles in the Proosa group and the morphologically close buckle-like object from Tjurkö. The buckle of unknown provenance from Denmark and three of the buckles from Sjörup are not included.

considered by Nils Åberg (1953: 89), on stylistic grounds, to be of a younger date than the Sjörup and Snartemo buckles. The almost identical parallel from Osendorf is dated to AD 525–600 by Schmidt (1968: 137). However, there is no evidence in the burial that support the late dating, more likely it can be placed in Schmidt’s group 1 (AD 450–525).

Technical construction

In a previous article dealing with Migration Period buckles with face masks (Franzén 2007), the author produced a chart with various types of constructions for buckles (Fig. 7).

The buckle from Proosa belongs to the type C2, where the frame and fastening plate are cast in one piece and the tongue is secured by a horizontal pin. The other buckles in the Proosa group, however, can not be satisfactorily placed within either of the illustrated types. Except for the buckle of unknown provenance from Denmark, which unfortunately lacks a tongue, they all have an identical construction where the fastening plate is wrapped around the frame like type B1. The main difference though, is that the tongue is fastened in a vertical fashion instead of being wrapped around the frame (Fig. 8). In other words, the fastening plate instead

of the frame secures the tongue. According to Slomann (1979: 114) the construction-type of the Snartemo buckle sets it apart from the other contemporary continental high status buckles. The construction of the buckle from Proosa is, to the author’s knowledge, likewise unparalleled in the continental archaeological record of high status buckles.

THE OVERALL SHAPE – POSSIBLE INFLUENCES

Three different groups of continental high status buckles will be highlighted in the discussion concerning possible influences for the overall shape of the Proosa group. These are: Provincial Roman buckles with a bag- or shield-like fastening plate, buckles with inlaid almandine stones and the so-called Gothic buckles. The labelling of the last mentioned group is not intended to signal the ethnicity of manufacturer or user in this study, with reference to its extensive use in the archaeological literature it will be used for reasons of convenience.

Finally, the above mentioned buckle from Ejsbøl with an octagonal fastening plate (Fig. 12:1) and its morphological connection to the Proosa group will also be discussed.

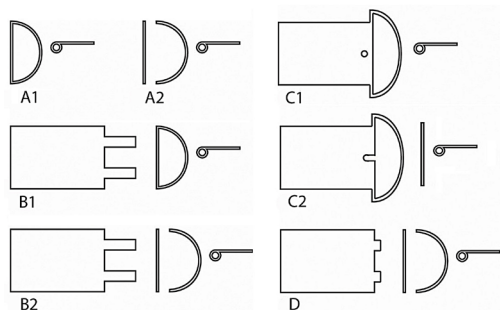


Fig. 7. Chart showing various types of construction for buckles. Drawing by Magnus Odéen.

Provincial Roman buckles with a bag- or shield-like fastening plate

In Markus Sommer's study (1984) of buckles from the 4th–5th centuries AD in the Roman Empire, three basic types are distinguished on the basis of their technical construction. One of these types is equivalent to the earlier mentioned B1 (Fig. 7) and is divided by Sommer into five different subtypes on the basis of the shape of the fastening plate. Two of these subtypes – buckles with a bag-like (*taschenförmig*) and shield-like fastening plate – are morphologically close to the Proosa group buckles if the almost circular shape of their fastening plates is considered. Buckles belonging to the bag-like group are plain or have simple decorations while two of the three buckles that comprise the shield-like group, from Vermand (Fig. 9:1) and Abbesville (Fig. 9:2), are highly ornate with niello inlay and ornamentation executed in chip carving. The latter two are dated to the first half of the 5th century AD, while the bag-like group is dated to the 4th century AD (Sommer 1984: 18–21, 30, 59, 65, 79–80). Furthermore, the circular shape can also be found among a few buckles which belong to a group that Sommer designates 'buckles with large fastening plates' (Behrens 1930: Taf. 32:A; Böhme 1974: Taf. 40: 4; Sommer 1984: 30–2, Taf. 11:2). Apart from buckles, a type of circular strap end with ornamentation executed in chip carving is identical with the fastening plates of the discussed types and should also be mentioned (Behrens 1930: 293–4; Sommer 1984: Taf. 22). A good likeness to this type can be found in a strap end from the Sjørup hoard (Salin 1894: Fig. 64).

A group of high status buckles described by István Bóna (1991: 172–3, 261–2), dating from the second half of the 4th to the beginning of the 5th century AD, are likely to have been influenced by the discussed circular types from Sommer's study. The buckles (e.g., Fig. 9:3–4) have mainly been recovered in Pannonia and the Black Sea area (Bóna 1991: 172, 261), but specimens are also known from the eastern and south-eastern parts of Poland (Madyda-Legutko 1986: Taf. 21:43–5). They are either made of silver or gilded copper-alloy and have a close to circular fastening plate together with a heavyset tongue and frame. Some of the buckles also have silver pins inlaid in their frames (Holmqvist 1951: 39). In the archaeological literature buckles of this type are sometimes referred to as Gothic (e.g., Fettich 1927).

Furthermore, with regard to the shape of the fastening plate, Aarni Erä-Esko (1986: 73) has linked the discussed buckles from Vermand and Abbesville (Fig. 9:1–2) to a pair of copper-alloy buckles recovered in a high status burial at Mahlaistentönkkä in Vähäkylä in Finland (Fig. 9:5). To this group the author would like to add two copper-alloy buckles from a chamber-burial at Karby in Täby parish in Sweden (Grönwall 2008). The larger of the two buckles from Karby (Fig. 9:6) has details in silver on the frame and a semicircular silver layer with stamped ornamentation on the fastening plate. The tongue of the buckle is also made of silver.

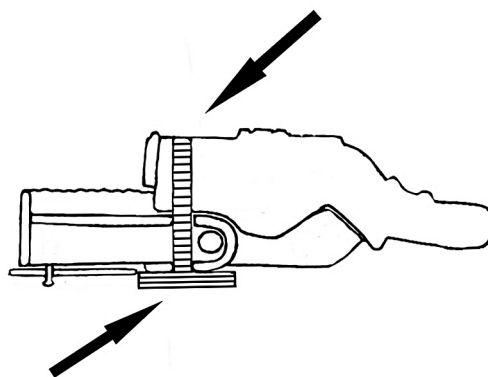


Fig. 8. Cross section of the Snartemo buckle. The arrows and the hatched area indicate that the tongue is attached to the fastening plate instead of the frame. After Slomann (1979: 110), modified.

However, contrary to the buckles from Vermand and Abbeville, the specimens from Karby and Mahlaistentönkkä belong to the C2 construction-type (Fig. 7), a construction-type which may be exclusive for Scandinavia. The astragal frame also separates them from their Provincial Roman counterparts. Although quite common along the edges of belt fittings (e.g. Sommer 1984: Taf. 43:1, 44:1, 46:1–2, 61:5), the astragal never seem to occur as decoration on the frames of buckles in the Provincial Roman milieu.

If the morphological properties of the fastening plate are considered the buckles discussed above must be considered to be related. The shape of the rather small and almost circular fastening plates of the buckles from Vermand and Abbeville is quite close to the fastening plates of the Proosa group buckles. However, the elevation is lacking which makes a connection less straight forward.

Buckles with inlaid almandine stones

Buckles of this kind (e.g., Fig. 10:1) are described by Bóna (1991: 100–101, 252–3) who links the appearance of the type in the archaeological record to the expansion of the Huns into south-eastern Europe. Bóna dates the type to AD 425–455. It is considered likely that buckles of this type were produced for the Huns by workshops in the Byzantine Empire (U. Näsman, pers. comm.). The buckles are made of gold and the inlaid almandine stones give their usually circular or pelta-shaped fastening plates an elevated appearance. Characteristic are also the plain tongue and frame which are heavysset, the latter circumstance is aesthetically motivated by the mentioned elevation of the fastening plate. Furthermore, the type had a very wide geographical spread (e.g., Fig. 10:2) and is frequently recovered in high status burials.

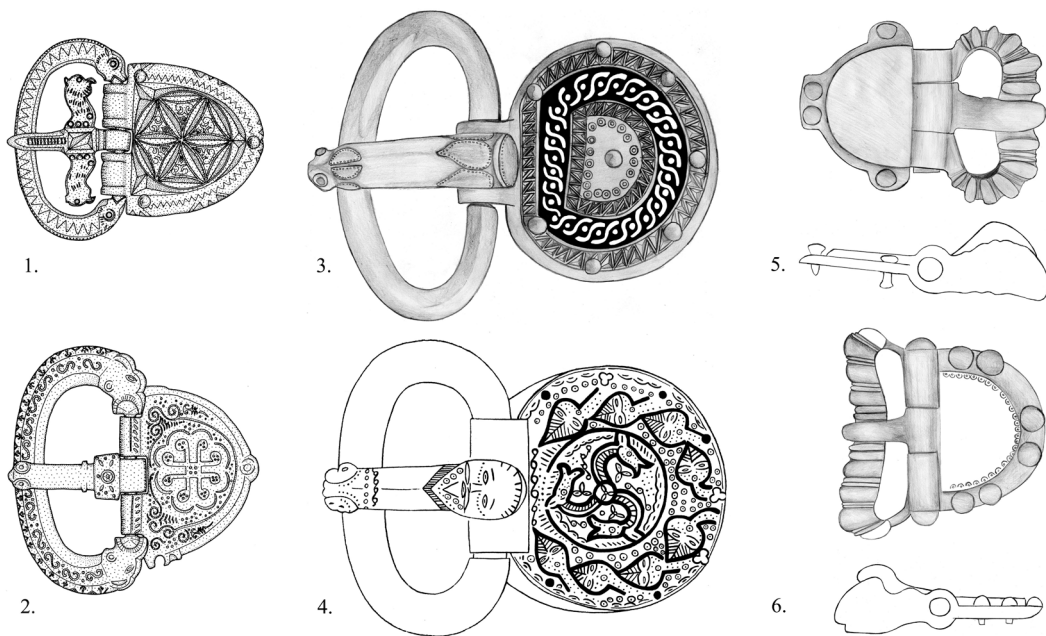


Fig. 9. 1. Buckle of gilded silver from Vermand in France. Length 62 mm. After Sommer (1984: 74: 1). 2. Copper-alloy buckle from Abbeville in France. Length 59 mm. After Sommer (1984: 9: 1). 3. Buckle of silver from a hoard recovered near Zamość in the southeastern part of Poland. Length 89 mm. Drawing by the author. 4. Buckle of silver from Jalta on the Crimean peninsula. Length 90 mm. After Baranow 1975: 273. 5. One of the two identical copper-alloy buckles from Mahlaistentönkkä in Vähäkylä in Finland. Length 42 mm. Drawing by the author. 6. Copper alloy-buckle with details in silver from Karby in Täby parish in Sweden. Length 35 mm. Drawing by the author.

Usually they are associated with shoe-wear but can sometimes be connected with the baldric as well.

According to Sommer (1984: 20–1) the earlier discussed Roman buckles with a bag-like fastening plate served as prototypes for the buckles of this kind which have a similarly shaped fastening plate (circular or pelta shaped). Less ornate buckles similar to the discussed Roman types have been recovered throughout southeastern Europe. The morphological properties of the fastening plates of the buckles with inlaid almandine stones have been influential and endured well into the 6th century AD. As examples of their influence, the buckles from the Gepidic high status burials in Aphaida (Hampel 1905: 295; Horedt & Protase 1972: Taf. 39) and Turda (Fig. 10:3; Barbulescu 2007) are outlined. The author would also like to propose, given the high degree of morphological coherence and their influence upon contemporary and succeeding high status buckles on the continent,

that the Proosa group buckles to a large extent have been modelled upon this type of buckle. Furthermore, Slomann (1979: 113–4) also acknowledges the influence upon the Snartemo buckle from ‘a series of gold strap buckles with inlaid almandine stones from the latter part of the 5th century A.D.’.

A buckle from a cemetery at Ártánd in the eastern part of Hungary dating to about AD 450 (Fig. 10:4; Mesterházy 1984) and its striking parallel recovered on Gotland in Sweden (Fig. 10:5) must also be noted in this context. Unfortunately the latter is of unknown provenance. These two buckles are clearly related to the discussed buckles with inlaid almandine stones with regard to the shape and size of the fastening plate together with the heavyset tongue and frame. However, they lack the inlaid stones in favour of chip carving which is a prominent feature in the Proosa group and on many of the ‘Gothic’ buckles discussed below.

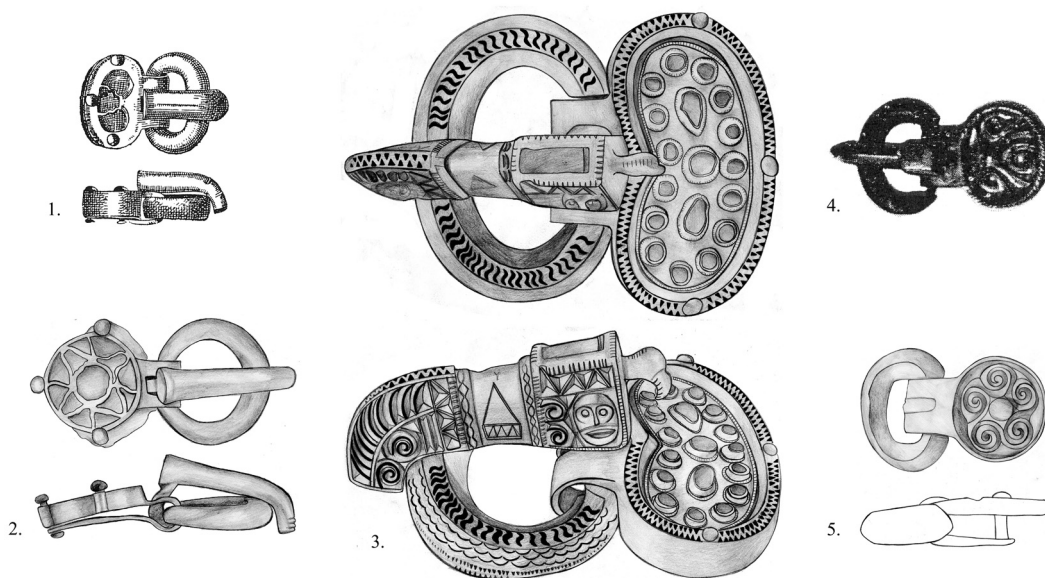


Fig. 10. 1. Buckle with inlaid almandine stones of unknown provenance from Hungary. After Hampel (1905: 295). 2. Buckle with inlaid almandine stones from Beja in Portugal dating to the first half of the 5th century AD. Length 54 mm. Drawing by the author. 3. Gepidic buckle with pelta-shaped fastening plate from Turda in Romania dating to the second half of the 5th century AD. Length 94 mm. Drawing by the author. 4. Buckle of gilded silver from a cemetery at Ártánd in Hungary. After Mesterházy 1984: 79. 5. Buckle of gilded silver from Gotland in Sweden. Length 26 mm. Drawing by the author.

The Gothic buckles

In a general sense, the high status buckles often referred to as Gothic in the archaeological literature can be characterized by their heavyset tongue and frame. Often they are quite ornate with niello inlay and patterns executed in chip carving. If the shape of the fastening plate is considered they can be divided in two main groups – quadrangular and rhombic. The former was first studied by Alfred Götze (1907) whose division of the type into four subtypes still is considered to be valid (Bierbrauer 1975: 126–7). The number of buckles belonging to this group is very large in contrast to the rhombic group (e.g., Fig. 11), which only comprises about 30 known specimens in all. Buckles from the rhombic group have been studied by, among others, Annibaldi & Werner (1963), Bierbrauer (1975), Kiss (1984), Näsman (1984b) and Werner (1977). A close morphological relationship between buckles of this kind and contemporary brooches with an identical rhombic shape and similar ornamentation is evident (e.g., Näsman 1984b: 65).

Slomann (1979: 113–4) has noted that the distinct arched shape of the tongues on the Snartemo and Sjörup buckles is likely to have been influenced by Gothic buckles (e.g., Fig. 11:1, 6). An identical arched shape can be observed on the tongue of the Nydam IV buckle

as well. Furthermore, Bernard Salin (1894: 97–8) has shown that the saddle-shape, present on the tongues of the Nydam IV and Sjörup buckles, most likely served the purpose of holding the strap which was placed under instead of over the fastening plate in order not to cover up the elaborate artwork.

The Ejsbøl buckle with an octagonal fastening plate

A number of arguments suggest a morphological relationship between the above mentioned buckle from Ejsbøl with an octagonal fastening plate (Fig 12:1) and the Proosa group buckles – the similar size, the elevated fastening plate with sunken interior together with the beaded edges of the fastening plate and the tongue. The last mentioned feature occurs on the Sjörup and Snartemo buckles. However, contrary to Slomann (1979: 113), the author would like to designate the Ejsbøl buckle as a somewhat more distant relative to the Proosa group since the circular shape of the fastening plate is lacking.

When discussing the morphology of the Ejsbøl specimen two other buckles should be considered – one from a burial at Saga located near the mouth of the river Dniepr in the Ukraine (Fig. 12:2; Annibaldi & Werner 1963: 371–3) and one from a hoard recovered near Kalisz in central Poland (Fig. 12:3; Petersen 1930). A number of

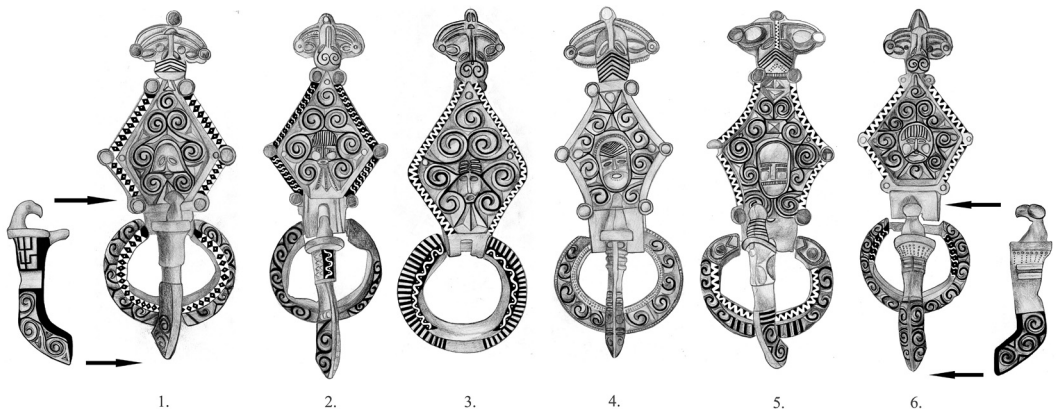


Fig. 11. Gothic buckles of gilded silver with face masks belonging to the rhombic group. 1. Gava in Hungary. Length 145 mm. 2. Acquasanta in Italy. Length 143 mm. 3. Dombovar in Hungary. Length 118 mm. 4. Kiskunfélegyháza in Hungary. Length 129 mm. 5. Acquasanta in Italy. Length 163 mm. 6. Aquileia in Italy. Length 136 mm. Note the scale. All drawings by the author.

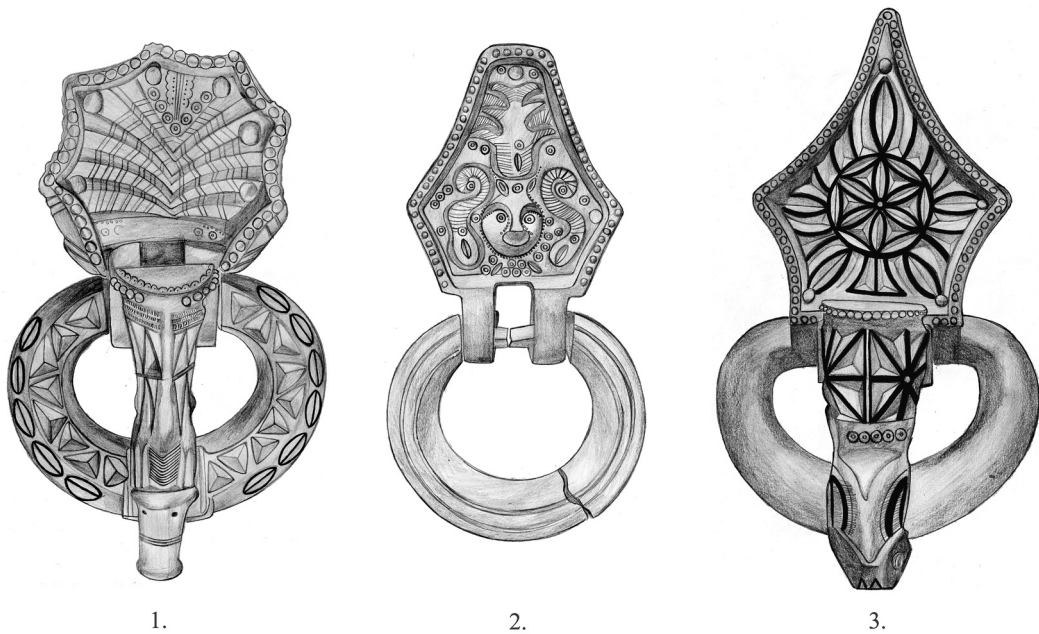


Fig. 12. 1. Buckle of gilded silver from the war booty sacrifice at Ejsbøl in Denmark. Length 82 mm. 2. Buckle of gilded silver from a burial at Saga in the Ukraine. Length 77 mm 3. Buckle of gilded silver from a hoard recovered near Kalisz in central Poland. Length 104 mm. All drawings by the

shared characteristics of these three buckles are stamped ornamentation, beaded rims and a close to similar shaped fastening plate which is elevated and has a sunken interior. Werner & Annibaldi (1963: 373) dates the Kalisz and Saga buckles to the first half of the 5th century AD, describing them as forerunners to the Gothic buckles with rhombic fastening plates. The author would like to propose that the buckle from Ejsbøl forms a group with the Saga and Kalisz buckles, but that it is morphologically close to the Proosa group as well with regard to the earlier stated shared characteristics and that the shape of its elevated fastening plate is close to circular. Andreas Rau considers the Ejsbøl buckle to be a direct predecessor to the Proosa group and dates the deposition to AD 425–450. (Andreas Rau, pers. comm.) According to Mogens Ørsnes (1988: 24) the deposition can be dated to about AD 400.

There appears to be no parallels to the previously discussed Gothic buckles with a rhombic fastening plate in Scandinavia. However, if the geographical scope is somewhat widened, three buckles recovered in Lithuania can be mentioned, two identical from a rich

burial at Taurapolis (Tautavicius 1981; 1996: 142) and one of unknown provenance from the village of Vilkyčiai (Åberg 1919: 118). Also a specimen from Konarzew in central Poland clearly belongs to this group (Werner 1977). Apart from the rhombic fastening plate, these buckles are decorated with the same style chip carving as the Gothic buckles (e.g., Fig. 11). If the Provincial Roman archaeological record is considered, the rhombic shape in connection with buckles is a rare feature in this milieu. In Migration Period Scandinavia three high status buckles with rhombic fastening plates can be detailed – the earlier mentioned buckle from Nydam II (Fig. 4:1), a buckle from an inhumation burial in Hablingbo parish on Gotland (Fig. 13:1; Nerman 1935: 80) and a buckle from the war booty sacrifice at Nydam IV in Denmark (Fig. 13:2; Vang Petersen 1994: 254). The chip carving patterns on the fastening plates of the latter two are identical, the same design can also be found on a brooch from Roma parish on Gotland (Nerman 1935: Taf. 35:359). As stated earlier, the Nydam IV war booty sacrifice is likely to have been deposited AD 470–480,

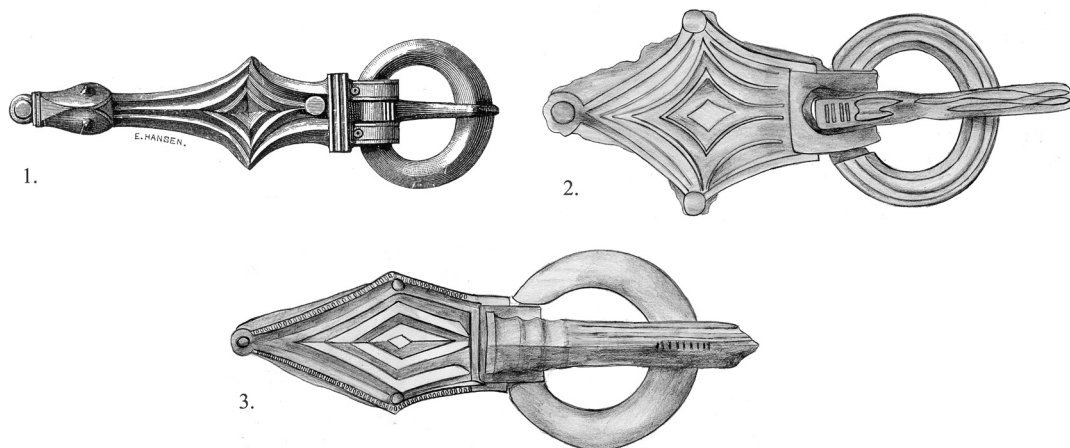


Fig. 13. 1. Buckle from an inhumation burial in Hablingbo parish on Gotland. Length 80 mm. After Nerman (1935: Taf. 49: 505). 2. Buckle of gilded silver from the war booty sacrifice at Nydam IV in Denmark. Length 72 mm. Drawing by the author. 3. Buckle from Cherkasy in the Ukraine. Length 85 mm. Drawing by the author.

which is in accordance with Birger Nerman's dating of the Hablingbo buckle to his period IV: 2 (Nerman 1935: 80).

A similar chip carving pattern, although more rigid, can be found on the rhombic fastening plate of a buckle from Cherkasy in the Ukraine (Fig. 13:3). Attila Kiss (1984: 60) considers this buckle to be a prototype for the earlier discussed Gothic buckles with a rhombic fastening plate. The author believes the Cherkasy buckle is closely related to the mentioned Scandinavian buckles from Hablingbo and Nydam IV.

THE ORNAMENTATION OF THE PROOSA BUCKLE

In this chapter a description of the ornamentation on the tongue, frame and fastening plate of the Proosa buckle will be given. The occurring features will be discussed in relation to the ornamentation on the corresponding parts of the other buckles in the Proosa group. Some of the features supposedly endowed with a highly symbolic value will be given a more thorough analysis.

The frame and fastening plate – animal art of Salin's style I

Apart from the large human head termination, the most striking feature of the Proosa buckle is the

abundantly exhibited animal art of Salin's style I. The artwork is executed in a rather dissolved fashion and covers all sides of the frame and the fastening plate. Furthermore, it is also found in an oval field within the sunken interior of the fastening plate and on the tongue.

The motif on the sides of the fastening plate (Fig. 14:1) forms a cohesive frieze and displays two animals, each with two visible legs, facing the same direction. The animal in the front can possibly also be interpreted as an anthropomorphic being with regard to the presence of what seems to be long curled up human hair on the top of the head. The motif on the frame (Fig. 14:2) is divided into four separate rectangular fields displaying two animals with their heads meeting at the point where the tongue rests on the frame. Two of the rectangular fields contain the heads of the animals while the other two displays two upper legs and one lower leg with a foot each. In contrast to the depiction on the sides of the fastening plate (Fig. 14:1) these animals are close to identical composition-wise. A similar division of the motif into rectangular frames, which is reminiscent of the metopes in the architrave of classical temples, can also be seen on some clasp buttons with Salin's style I animal art (e.g., Erä-Esko 1965: Pl. 8:28–30). In the oval field within the sunken interior of the fastening plate the motif (Fig. 14:3) consists of various body parts of which some can be

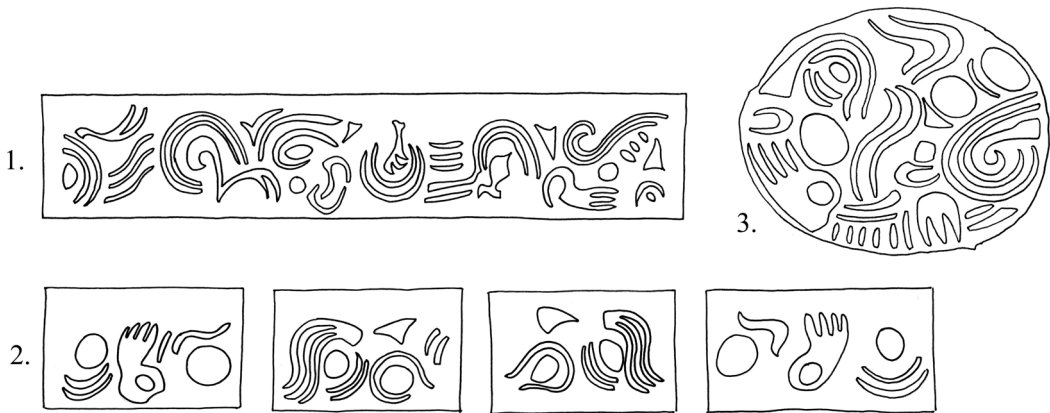


Fig. 14. 1. Frieze on the fastening plate of the Proosa buckle depicting two animals executed in Salin's style I. 2. Rectangular fields on the frame of the Proosa buckle depicting two animals executed in Salin's style I. 3. Oval field within the sunken interior of the fastening plate depicting various body parts executed in Salin's style I. All drawings by Magnus Odéen.

identified with guidance from the artwork on the frame and fastening plate. However, the mutual relationship between the body parts is difficult to determine.

If the other buckles in the Proosa group are considered, the last mentioned part of the buckle is decorated in variety of ways. The Snartemo buckle (Fig. 3) has filigree and granulation work together with now lost inlaid stones (Slomann 1979: 110), while the two buckles from Denmark (Fig. 5:1, 3) are decorated with patterns executed in chip carving. An adequate depiction of this part of the Finnestorp buckle is unfortunately lacking, although some stamped ornamentation in the shape of circles is visible and according to Bengt Nordqvist (2007: 228) four birds facing each other can be seen. Unfortunately on the Sjörup buckles the plate within the sunken interior of the fastening plate is missing.

Apart from the Proosa buckle, animal art of Salin's style I appear on the Snartemo and Nydam IV buckles. On the latter it is restricted to a small area on the front part of the tongue, a motif is not discernable. The buckle from Snartemo carries two motifs: one large four legged animal on the front part of the tongue facing towards the fastening plate and one smaller animal situated in the back of the tongue. It is observed that the animal art on this buckle is clearly less dissolved compared to the Proosa buckle. The four legged animal will be discussed in the chapter dealing

with the ornamentation on the tongue of the Proosa buckle.

The tongue - human head termination

The first part of this chapter provides an overview of the animal heads commonly occurring on the Provincial Roman high status buckles from the Continent, since a relationship between adornments of this kind and the human head terminations on the Proosa and Finnestorp buckles is evident. Before the latter are discussed in detail, a brief account of buckles with face masks in the archaeological record will follow given the rarity of the feature.

Animal heads on buckles

On buckles in the Provincial Roman archaeological record the animal heads usually can be seen as terminations on the two ends of the frame facing the fastening plate (e.g., Fig. 9:1–2) or as confronting heads in the front part of the frame where they flank the tongue. In the latter case the heads can often be identified as dolphins. In the late Romano-British material a type of buckle with confronting horses' heads projecting from the front part of the frame is quite common, also projecting birds can be seen on some buckles. In the contemporary continental material the latter feature is almost unparalleled while horses' heads occur on some

buckles, although here they are somewhat less naturalistic (Ager 2007: 142). If the tongue of the Provincial Roman buckles is considered, animals can often be seen as terminations in the front part of the tongue facing away from the fastening plate (e.g., Fig 9:1–2) or they occur in the middle of the tongue (e.g., Fig. 9:1; Haseloff 1973: 431–5). However, animal head terminations in the back of the tongue facing towards the fastening plate – as can be seen on the previously discussed Gothic buckles with a rhombic fastening plate (Fig. 11:1–2, 4–6) and the buckle from the Gepidic high status burial in Turda (Fig. 10:3) – doesn't seem to occur in the Provincial Roman milieu.

According to Sommer (1984: 70) the animal head terminations on the frame derived from early 4th century Germanic buckles. The author would like to propose that the origin may be found in a shield insignia used by certain regiments in the Roman army (Alföldi 1935; Almgren 1948: 97–8). The basic shape of the insignia – horns with animal head terminations mounted on a pole (Fig. 15:1) – is quite similar to the frames with animal head terminations on Provincial Roman buckles (Fig. 15:2). It can also

be observed that horns without the animal head terminations possibly are present on a group of four Migration Period buckles recovered in Scandinavia with face masks on the front part of their frames (Franzén 2007). The frames of these buckles can be interpreted as horns belonging to the face mask (Fig. 15:3).

A highly unusual composition with animal head terminations can be seen on the frame of a buckle from the war booty sacrifice at Ejsbøl (Fig. 16). Two heads – presumably of animals – are in the process of swallowing two identical but smaller heads. Apart from the possibility of having a deeper mythological meaning, the motif may be connected to the function of a buckle. According to Ingemar Olsson (1959: 84–5) the word for buckle in Old Norse, *sulghion*, can be equated with the verb 'swallow' which illustrates how the buckle swallows the strap.

Human face masks on buckles

In general, human face masks on buckles are a somewhat rare feature in the archaeological record. If the late Romano-British material is considered a group of buckles with human heads and birds projecting from the frame and fastening

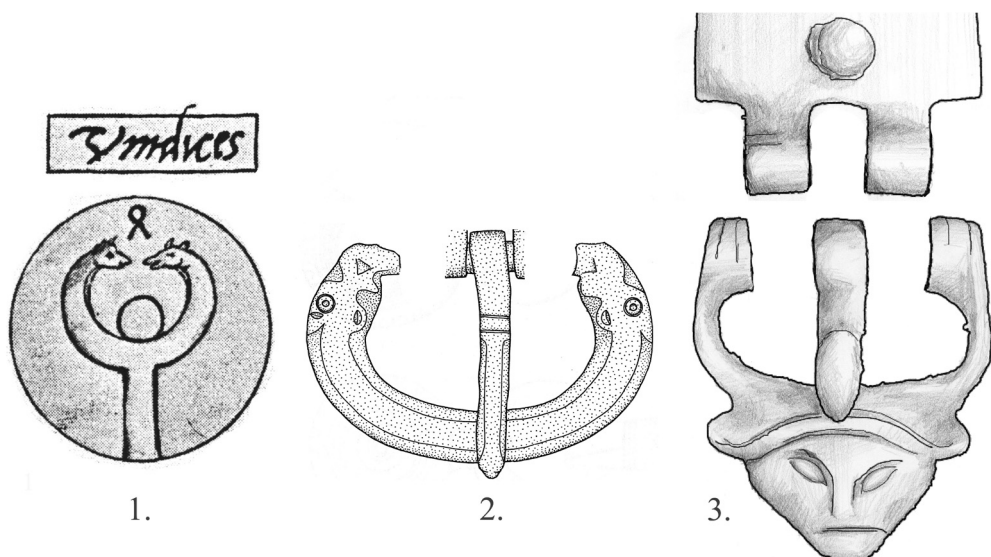


Fig. 15. 1. Shield insignia used by certain regiments in the Roman army. After Alföldi (1935: Taf. 46). 2. A frame with animal head terminations of a Provincial Roman buckle from Dorchester in England. After Sommer (1984: Taf. 72), modified. 3. Face mask on the frame of a copper-alloy buckle from a burial in Ösmo parish in the lake Mälaren area, Sweden. Drawing by Magnus Odéen.

plate can be mentioned, according to Barry Ager (2007: 141) this group may represent a resurgence of native tradition in the late Roman period. In the Provincial Roman material from the Continent figures and portrait busts of the emperor or members of the imperial family, often combined with hunt scenes, can be found on the fastening plates on a number of buckles. Buckles of this type were produced in Roman workshops in contrast to the Romano-British buckles mentioned above, which likely were manufactured by local craftsmen (Ager 2007: 141–2).

If Migration Period Scandinavia is considered, the previously mentioned group of buckles with face masks on the front part of the frame can be mentioned. Three of these buckles stems from the lake Mälaren area in Sweden and one from the island of Tytterskär in the Gulf of Finland. The latter and two of the specimen recovered in Sweden can be stylistically linked to a style of mask described by Günther Haseloff (1981: 91–4) as exhibiting ‘large animal heads seen from above’. The fourth face mask (Fig. 15:3) deviates morphologically with regard to the triangular shape of the face. A similar face mask can be found on a fitting from Norra Kvinneby on Öland (Franzén 2007: 162).

From the continental archaeological record the so called ‘Daniel buckles’ can be mentioned (Kühn 1943). The motif on their fastening plates, a face mask depicted en face flanked by two animals, have been interpreted as representing a biblical motif of Daniel in the lions’ den story. The origin of the motif can be found in the Roman art (Haseloff 1981: 81–5) and on buckles it survived well into the 7th century AD. Late Scandinavian examples include a buckle from Åker in Norway (Rygh 1885: Fig. 327) and a buckle from Rådmansängarna in the southern part of Sweden (Strömberg 1961: 114). An earlier version of the motif can be seen on the earlier mentioned buckle from Saga (Fig. 12:2). On this buckle the flanking animals may be seen as snakes, hence it is possible to interpret the motif as Gunnar in the snake pit. The fish below the face mask on the Saga buckle can be seen as a Christian symbol (cf. Hentze 1934: 59–62).

Face masks depicted en face without flanking animals is a prominent feature on the previously mentioned six Gothic buckles with rhombic fastening plates (Fig. 11), which Bierbrauer

(1975: 134) dates to the second half of the 5th century AD. On these buckles terminations with face masks flanked by pairs of birds can be seen as well. The latter mask is morphologically close to the mentioned large animal heads seen from above described by Haseloff and it may be considered unclear whether they are zoomorphic or anthropomorphic. The mask with flanking birds can be found on other Gothic buckles belonging



Fig. 16. Buckle of gilded silver from the war booty sacrifice at Ejsbøl in Denmark. Length 88 mm. Drawing by the author.



Fig. 17. Viking Age copper-alloy buckles with fastening plates in the shape of face masks recovered in Sweden. 1. Vendel parish, Uppland. Length 64 mm. After Nerman (1971: 47). 2. Väske parish, Gotland. Length 62 mm. Drawing by the author. 3. Hablingbo parish, Gotland. Length 58 mm. After Nerman (1971:47). 4. Hälsingtuna parish, Hälsingland. Length 43 mm. After Olsson (1985: 22). 5. Ekerö parish, Uppland. Length 54 mm. Drawing by the author. 6. Fröjels parish, Gotland. Length 48 mm. After Nerman (1971: 47).

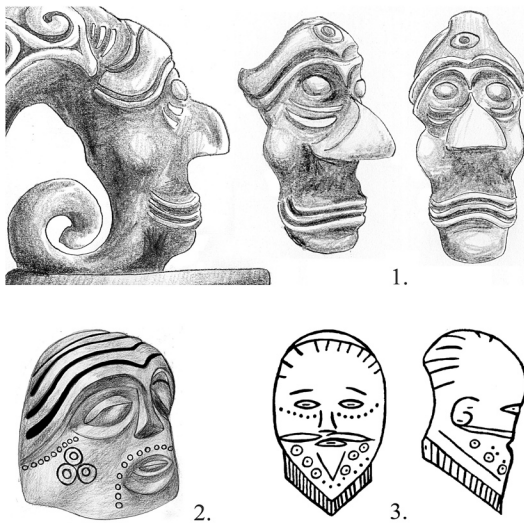


Fig. 18, left. 1. Human head termination on the tongue of the Proosa buckle. Drawing by Magnus Odéen. 2. Human head termination on the tongue of the Finnestorp buckle. Drawing by the author. 3. Human head termination on the tongue of the buckle from Jalta. After Baranow (1975: 273).

to the rhombic group as well (Bierbrauer 1975: 133–42; Kiss 1984). It shall also be noted that the previously discussed buckle from Turda is adorned with a small face mask on the side of its tongue (Fig. 10:3).

A number of Viking Age examples occur in a group recovered in Sweden with fastening plates in the shape of face masks (Fig. 17). By way of comparison with a picture of the German-Roman emperor Otto I, Birger Nerman (1971) has interpreted the headgears of these face masks as imitations of imperial crowns.

The image of Loki

Apart from the full plasticity and the placement on the tongue, there is little that suggests a closer morphological bond between the two human head terminations on the tongues of the Proosa and Finnestorp buckles (Fig. 18:1–2).

The compact face mask on the Finnestorp buckle, adorned with stamped circles and minute circular indentations, is similar to the face mask (Fig. 18:3) on the earlier mentioned buckle from Jalta (Fig. 9:4). According to Ivan Baranow (1975) the Jalta-buckle can be dated to the beginning of the 5th century AD and the style of the depiction of the face is typical for the Caucasus and Iran during Kushano-Sasanid epoch.



Fig. 19. 1. The character of Punch from the puppet theatre. Photograph by User Musphot on Wikimedia Commons 2. Masks of Pulcinella in the Commedia dell'arte theatre. After Marcia (1984: 107, 110, 112).

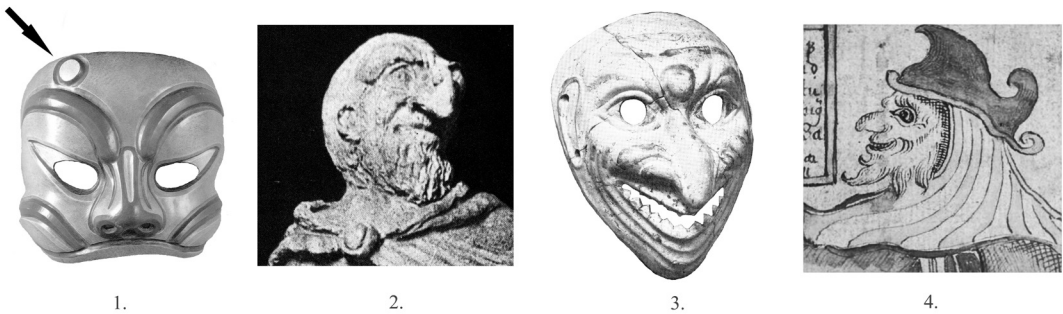


Fig. 20. 1. Mask of the zanni-character Arlecchino with the characteristic wart on the forehead highlighted. After Marcia (1984: 45). 2. Roman statue possibly depicting Maccus dating to the 1st century AD. After Marcia (1984: 17). 3. Roman bronze mask possibly depicting Maccus recovered near Cologne (Kölnisches Stadtmuseum). After Speaight (1970: 98) 4. Depiction of Loki from an 18th century Icelandic manuscript. Image from the Árni Magnússon Institute in Iceland.

The Proosa face is connected to the tongue by way of an upwards bending arch, enabling a larger and more elongated face with a more refined expression. Prominent features are the large and slightly beaked nose, the unnaturally broad smiling mouth and the rather high and distinctively marked cheek bones. The circle on the forehead must also be noted. It is likely that a high degree of importance have been ascribed to these facial features by the artist.

The features of the Proosa face undoubtedly bring to mind the character of Punch from the puppet theatre (Fig. 19:1), whose origin may be derived to the 16th century Italian Commedia dell'arte and the Neapolitan stock character of Pulcinella. The physical appearance of the Punch puppet is considered to have been modelled upon the masks and puppets used by travelling entertainers to portray Pulcinella (Currell 1985: 9). It can also be noted that John Rudlin (1994:

141) considers the chicken squawk of Pulcinella to be very similar to the 'swazzle' used by Punch and Judy Professors. Pulcinella is part of a group of characters called Zanni categorized as buffoons and comic servants. Among the characteristic traits for the traditional Pulcinella-mask (Fig. 19:2) can be mentioned a large beaked nose, a face furrowed with wrinkles and a large wart on the forehead (Duchartre 1966: 220–1; Rudlin 1994: 140). The wart can be seen on many other Zanni-masks as well (Fig 20:1; Marcia 1984) and it is similar to the mentioned circle on the forehead of the Proosa face.

The origin of the Commedia dell'arte has been ascribed to the Atellan Farce, which flourished in the 3rd century BC near the town of Atella (Duchartre 1966: 24–9). The wide chronological gap suggests that an unbroken tradition is not likely although some analogies can't be disregarded altogether. Pulcinella is considered to have been modelled upon the characters of Maccus and Bucco (Duchartre 1966: 29, 208–10). Like Pulcinella, Maccus has a beaked nose, hunched back, long spindling legs and the habit of peeping like a frightened chicken. The last mentioned habit earned him the name 'the hen', Pullus Gallinaceus, which developed into Pulcinello or Pulcino and finally Pulcinella. From Bucco Pulcinella is thought to have derived his great flabby cheeks and enormous mouth (Duchartre 1966: 209). The dual heredity is expressed in both the appearance and behaviour of Pulcinella (Duchartre 1966: 208–9). An illustrative example of the former is the hunched back which is counterbalanced by a pot belly. Sometimes the back is divided in two humps which also can be interpreted as a sign of split personality (Rudlin 1994: 139). If the

duality in behaviour is considered it is expressed by the ability of Pulcinella to perform both the function of master and servant, a trait which sets him apart from the other Zanni-characters (Rudlin 1994: 138). In the Louvre a beaked nosed Roman statue with a wide and grinning mouth dating to the 1st century AD is considered to be a representation of Maccus (Fig. 20:2). Identical features can be seen on a Roman bronze mask recovered near Cologne (Fig. 20:3), the circular mark on the forehead must also be noted (cf. Fig. 18:1, 20:1).

By their grotesque physical appearance and their actions, the characters of Punch and Pulcinella may be described as tricksters, which in mythology and the study of religion are characters who disobey normal rules and norms of behaviour (Koepping 1985: 193–4). With reference to the high degree of morphological coherence between the Proosa face, the Punch puppet, the Pulcinella mask and the Roman masks supposedly depicting Maccus, the author considers an interpretation of the Proosa face as a manifestation of the trickster to be plausible. According to Klaus-Peter Koepping (1985: 194) two forms of action seem to designate the trickster across all cultural variations: his cunning form of intelligence and the grotesqueness of body imagery used to indicate the inversion of social order. Arguably the last form of action is clearly present in the Proosa face and its parallels. In Norse mythology the god or giant Loki (Fig. 20:4) is by some scholars considered to be a trickster (Koepping 1985: 200), which leads to the possible interpretation that we are presented with a rendering of Loki on the Proosa buckle. The occurrence of the Loki-motif in the Migration Period has also been discussed by

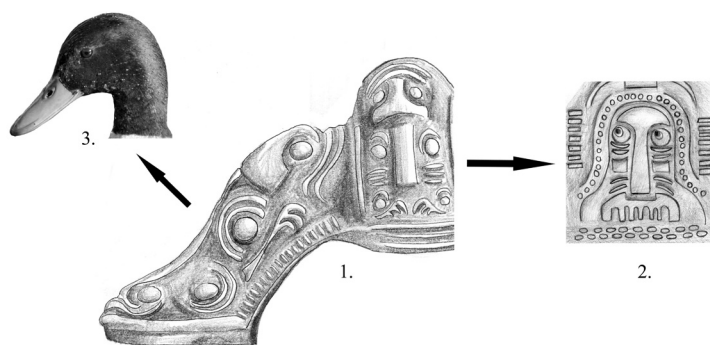


Fig. 21. 1. Four legged animals executed in Salin's style I on the tongue of the Proosa buckle. Drawing by Magnus Odéen. 2. Face mask on a belt fitting of gilded silver from Szentendre in Hungary. Drawing by the author. 3. The head of a male mallard (wild duck). Image from www.natures-desktop.com (Dave Massey).

Karl Hauck in relation to the iconography of the bracteates (e.g., Hauck 1970).

Finally, the prominent function of the Proosa buckle as part of the baldric must be taken into consideration. The supposedly high symbolical meaning of objects associated with sword and scabbard have earlier been discussed by Joachim Werner in relation to sword pommel rings and sword pearls (Werner 1953: 57; 1956: 26–37). The author would like to see the trickster on the Proosa buckle as highlighting a boundary between the sword and its carrier - between the world of the living and the dead. The trickster acts as a mediator between the two opposites (life and death) of which he retains a little bit of both, which create an ambiguous and equivocal character (Lévi-Strauss 1963: 226; Koepping 1985: 198–9).

The tongue - puzzle pictures

On the tongue of the Proosa buckle three four legged animals executed in Salin's style I can be seen. Two are facing each other and occur on a hump in the middle of the tongue while a larger animal is situated in the front part of the tongue facing the mentioned hump (Fig. 21:1). The author would like to propose an alternate reading of these animals; hence they may constitute puzzle pictures.

The bodies of the first mentioned animals situated on the hump are possible to read as face masks. In the alternate reading the front upper legs of the animals constitute the eyes of the mask while the spine is a nose. Furthermore, the horizontal lines between the legs of the animals may be seen as accentuating lines under the eyes of the face mask. A resembling face mask can be found on a belt fitting from Szentendre in Hungary (Fig. 21:2; Bóna 1976: 66). It may be considered unclear whether the hind legs of the discussed animals can be seen as forming the mouth of the face masks in the alternate reading. However, the inward pointed lower legs with feet are undoubtedly reminiscent of the 'comb-like' mouth of the face mask from Szentendre. Contacts between Scandinavia and the Black Sea area during the Migration Period have been discussed by many scholars (e.g., Forssander 1937; Hagberg 1972; Näsman 1984a; 1984b).

The alternate reading of the larger animal is

provided by Birgit Arrhenius (1979: 261) who described this part of the tongue as a large bird's head. The upper parts of the front legs constitute the eyes of the bird and the profiled bottom part of the tongue can be seen as a rendering of the beak, which creates an appearance reminiscent of a duck (Fig. 21:3).

The two puzzle pictures on the Proosa buckle project a duality which further highlights the earlier discussed Loki-interpretation. Like the puzzle pictures, Loki is attributed to have been an adept shape-shifter with the ability to change both his form and sex. Other features of the Proosa buckle which can be seen as signalling duality include the curled up chin of the large human head termination (Fig. 18:1). Apart from being an example of grotesqueness of body imagery, the chin creates a spiral going in the opposite direction compared to the spiral tendrils found on the arch above the head. Furthermore, the upward and downward orientation of the tongue itself – the arch behind the human head bending upwards versus the tongue bending downwards over the frame (Fig. 1) – may also be interpreted as projecting duality. Apart from having a deeper symbolic meaning, the last two features may of course also be regarded from a purely aesthetic point of view, as serving the purpose of balancing the overall composition of the buckle.

It must also be observed that the discussed alternate reading of the four legged animals provides three isolated face masks on the Proosa tongue, namely the heads of these animals. The two masks on the uppermost part of the hump consist of mouth, eyes, nose and helmet/headgear. The last two features are connected to each other and form one cohesive shape. Furthermore, the mouth is very broad in relation to the rest of the facial features and underneath each eye an accentuating line can be found. The same features can be found on the previously discussed large human head termination as well (Fig. 18:1). The face mask belonging to the four legged animal on the front part of the tongue is similar to the smaller ones, although here accentuating lines can be found above the eyes as well. If the mouth of the discussed face masks is disregarded and only the eyes together with the helmet/headgear are considered, the masks become identical to a type of mask Erä-Esko has named 'half faces' (Erä-Esko 1965: 93–5). Masks

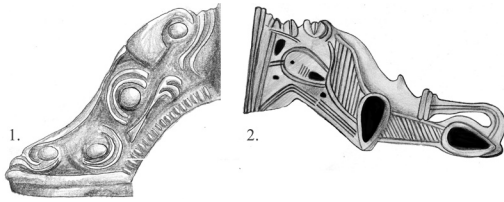


Fig. 22. 1. Four legged animal on the front part of the tongue of the Proosa buckle. Drawing by Magnus Odéen. 2. Four legged animal on the front part of the tongue of the Sstartemo buckle. Drawing by the author.

of this kind can be found on a supposed tongue of a buckle recovered in Ojaveski in the northern part of Estonia (Kivikoski 1940: Fig. 9). They also occur on cruciform brooches recovered in Norway (e.g., Reichstein 1975: Taf. 49).

The tongue – large four legged animal

The large four legged animal on the front part

of the Proosa tongue (Fig. 22:1) has a striking parallel in the animal on the corresponding part of the Sstartemo buckle (Fig. 22:2). With regard to the identical composition and placement it must be considered likely that the former was modelled upon the latter. According to Slomann (1979: 110) a smaller animal can also be seen facing the snout of the Sstartemo animal. However, it becomes clear that this smaller animal actually is a part of the head of the large animal if the similar animal heads on a relief brooch from Hemse on Gotland (Arbman 1945) and on an equal-armed brooch from Gullydynt in Finland (Erä-Esko 1965: Pl. 1:7) are taken into consideration.

The plain space above the upper back of the Sstartemo animal may be perceived as a mane. A parallel can be found in the mane of a lion depicted on a brooch from Stade in Hannover (Fig. 23:1). Salin considered the figurative ornamentation on the Stade-brooch to have more Roman than Germanic traits (Salin 1904: 237), although the connection to style I become

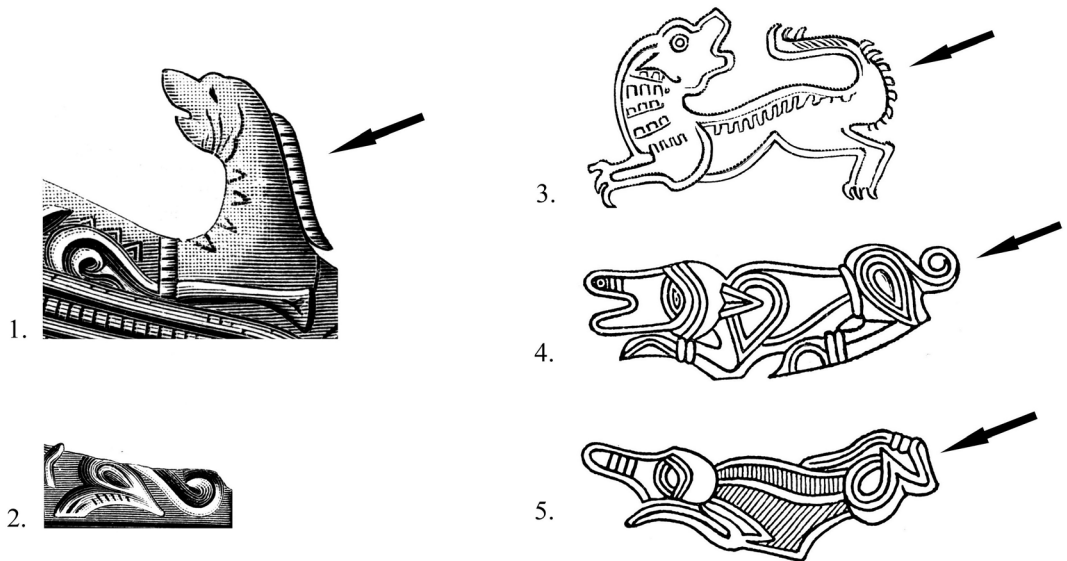


Fig. 23. 1. Lion on a brooch from Stade in Hannover. After Salin 1904: 78. 2. Hind leg and tail of an animal on a brooch from Stade in Hannover. After Salin 1904: 78. 3. Lion on the fastening plate of a Provincial Roman buckle from the department of Ardennes in France. After Salin 1904: 125. 4. Four legged animal executed in Salin's style I on a relief brooch from Gummersmark on Sjaelland in Denmark. After Åberg 1924: 27. 5. Four legged animal executed in Salin's style I on a relief brooch from Vedstrup on Sjaelland in Denmark. After Åberg 1924: 27.

evident if the upper part of a hind leg on the same brooch is considered (Fig. 23:2).

Furthermore, an alternate reading of the curled up lower part of the hind leg situated above the lower back of the Snartemo animal as a tail is quite possible. The tail of a lion depicted on the fastening plate of a Provincial Roman buckle from the department of Ardennes in France is arched over the lower back in the same fashion (Fig. 23:3). It must also be noted that tails can be found on other four legged animals executed in Salin's style I as well (e.g. Fig. 23:4), but were never discussed in-depth by Salin. The author considers the discussed feature on the Snartemo animal to be a merger of a tail and a hind leg, an identical feature can be seen on a four legged animal on a brooch from Vedstrup on Sjaelland (Fig. 23:5). Haseloff (1973: 409–14) has convincingly shown that the four legged animal occurring along the edges of late Roman chip-carved bronzes was modelled upon the lion in the classical art. Often they have somewhat different qualities than the classical lion, e.g. slender bodies, but the presence of attributes such as the mane, the tail and the open mouth provides good evidence. Furthermore, it is considered likely that many of the motives occurring on the late

Roman chip-carved bronzes were transferred to Scandinavia during the course of the 5th century AD (Hasselof 1973: 442), which explains the discussed lion-like attributes of the Snartemo animal. However, the interpretation of the four legged animal in Style I as a lion was opposed by Bernard Salin (1904: 206).

The impact of official Roman art on the Germanic figurative art during the Migration Period has also been discussed by Bertil Almgren (1948). The importance of the lion symbol in the former can in part be explained by the slaying of the Nemean lion by Hercules in Greek mythology. According to the myth, the pelt and claws of the lion held special powers which led to them being used as attributes by many Roman emperors (Fig 24:1; Hannestad 1986: 246). Furthermore, the standard bearer responsible for the eagle standard in the Roman army, the aquilifer, is also depicted wearing a lion's pelt over his uniform (Fig. 24:2). The lion motif was also of importance in the Assyrian and Persian Empires due to the royal sport of capturing and hunting of lions (Roaf 1990: 154–5). Sasanian versions of the motif have been found on silver plates (e.g., Fig. 24:3; Orbeli 1938: 722–5). Scandinavian examples from the 4th century AD

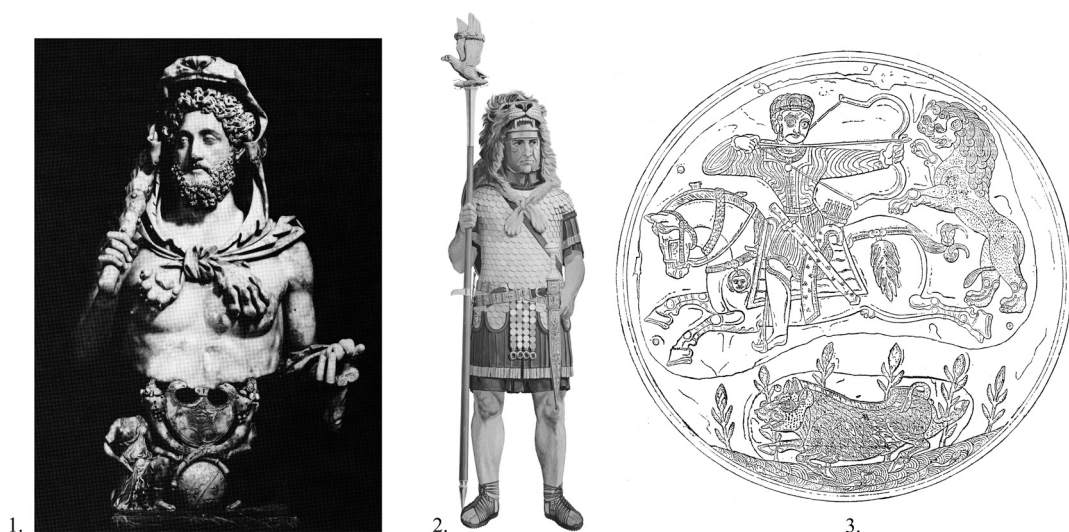


Fig. 24. 1. Marble bust of Commodus as Hercules recovered in the ruins of an imperial palace on the Esquiline. After Hannestad (1986: 247). 2. Aquilifer in the Roman army wearing a lion's pelt. After Connolly (2006: 306). 3. Partially gilt Sasanian silver plate, applied repoussé and engraved, depicting bowman shooting a lion. Recovered in Perm in Russia. Diameter 28 cm. After Hampel (1905: 272).

include the high status belts from Ejsbøl and Neudorf-Bornstein which are decorated with lions (Carnap-Bornheim 2003) and a fitting in the shape of a lion from the Nydam find (Jørgensen & Vang Petersen 2003: 268).

The pear-shaped noose underneath the head of the animal on the Snartemo buckle (Fig. 22:2) must also be noted since it may indicate that the animal has been captured and is tied to the buckle. A similar motif can be found on a copper-alloy key (Fig. 25) recovered in the Drenthe province in the north-east of the Netherlands, which is dated by Almgren (1955: 20) to the 8th century AD. A possible interpretation of the motif may be found in the myth from Norse mythology in which the wolf Fenrir is tied with a magic rope by the Aesir.

The tongue – classical vegetative art

Features from the classical vegetative art executed in chip carving can be found on all the Proosa group buckles except for the specimen from Finnestorp. The Sjörup buckles (Fig. 2) are decorated with simple spiral tendrils, pelta-shapes and palmettes. Similar ornamentations can be found on the corresponding parts of the Snartemo buckle as well (Fig. 3). The two buckles from Denmark (Fig. 5:1, 3) have somewhat more complex and rigid chip carving patterns within the sunken interior of their fastening plates that are closer to the chip carving on Provincial Roman buckles (cf. Böhme 1974: 54). In contrast, John-Elof Forssander (1937: 77–9) claims the chip carving on the Sjörup buckles have been influenced by the corresponding art work on the



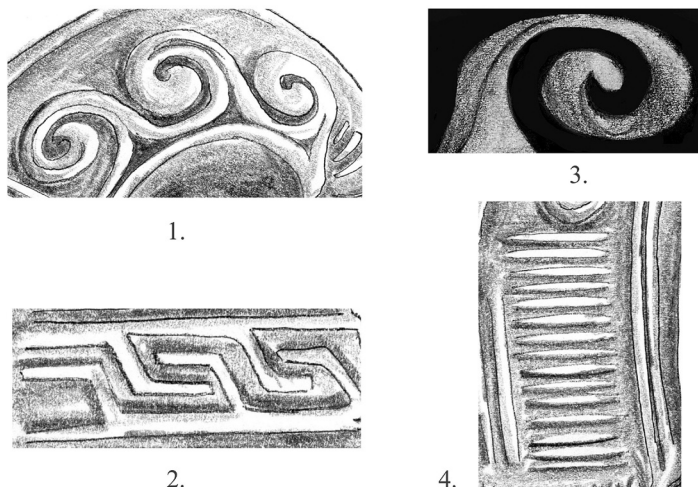
Fig. 25. Copper-alloy key with depiction of a tied beast recovered in the Drenthe province in the north-east of the Netherlands dating to the 8th century AD. Length 114 mm. After Almgren (1955: Pl. 25a).

Gothic buckles. The motif on the Danish buckle of unknown provenance (Fig. 5:1) is the so called Kotshak cross, a motif commonly occurring on the Provincial Roman high status buckles (Böhme 1974: 54). Linguistically ‘kotshak’ means horned and the symbol has its origin in the art of the Hittites, the Urartians and the Phrygians. The earliest known depiction is Urartian and can be dated to the 8th century BC. Later the cross style was transferred to the collection of designs of the Christian Oriental Church and is considered to be typical of Christian-Armenian art (Gantzhorn 1998: 53–4, 266, 318–9). The buckle from Nydam IV (Fig. 5:3) carries a similar motif, although the horns have been placed in between the arms of the cross instead of crowning them. The cross-symbol and the impact of Christian culture in Scandinavia during the Migration Period are discussed by Charlotte Fabech & Ulf Näsman (2009).

The vegetative art on the Proosa buckle has different characteristics and is a less prominent feature than on the Sjörup, Snartemo and the two Danish buckles. It is restricted to a relatively small area of the tongue behind the large human head termination and consists of a row of spiral tendrils and a meander which are executed in relief (Fig. 26:1–2). In contrast, the corresponding artwork on the Snartemo (Fig. 26:3), Sjörup and the two Danish buckles are sunken into the material. It can also be observed that the meander on the Proosa buckle lacks straight angles in contrast to the meanders on the Sjörup buckles (Salin 1894: 90). Furthermore, a group of horizontal (Fig. 26:4) and vertical lines can be observed next to the meander on the Proosa buckle, an ornamentation which is unparalleled in the Proosa group.

The Finnestorp buckle (Fig. 5:2) is characterised by a rather plain tongue, frame and fastening plate. The animal head terminations on the frame, the row of stamped ornamentation on the sides of the fastening plate and the four birds facing each other within the sunken interior of the fastening plate are features which are only to be found on this buckle within the Proosa group. The motif of birds facing each other has a parallel in a brooch from Kvie on Gotland which Ulf Näsman (1984b: 70) dates to the time around AD 450. A similar motif, although with a face mask depicted en face situated in between the birds, is observed on the previously discussed Gothic

Fig. 26. 1. Spiral tendrils executed in relief on the tongue of the Proosa buckle. Drawing by Magnus Odéen. 2. Meander pattern executed in relief on the tongue of the Proosa buckle. Drawing by Magnus Odéen. 3. Spiral tendrils on the frame of the Snartemo buckle. Drawing by the author. 4. Horizontal lines on the tongue of the Proosa buckle. Drawing by Magnus Odéen.



buckles with a rhombic fastening plate (Fig. 11:1–6). A buckle with this kind of termination from Bascordas in Hungary constituted a closed find together with a Theodosius II-coin dating to AD 443 (Näsman 1984b: 66). Furthermore, friezes of similar style birds facing the same direction occur on the edges of brooches recovered on Öland, Gotland, north-western France, Hungary and Italy (Näsman 1984b: 64–7). Besides brooches, the bird friezes are also found on buckles from Hungary and Italy. The motif is considered to have been transferred to Scandinavia from the southeastern part of Europe (Näsman 1984b: 65–6, 71–3).

The row of stamped ornamentation in the shape of triangles crowned with circles found on the sides of the fastening plate of the Finnestorp buckle is a kind of ornamentation quite common on Provincial Roman buckles (Böhme 1974: 72) and in the Scandinavian archaeological record from the Migration Period (Salin 1904: 158). According to Salin (1904: 159–60) the motif has its origin in the lesbian Cymatium, which is a moulding on the cornice in the classical architecture. The stamped ornamentation on the Finnestorp buckle may indicate a closer connection with the earlier mentioned buckle from Nydam II (Fig. 4:1) and the buckle from Ejsbøl with an octagonal fastening plate (Fig. 12:1). In the archaeological research stamped ornamentation has traditionally been associated with the early part of the Migration period but, although less prominent, also occurs later in

the period (for a more in-depth discussion see Bitner-Wróblewska 2001: 89–90).

CONCLUSIONS

The survey of the Proosa buckle has shown that it forms a group with eight other high status buckles recovered in Scandinavia – the Proosa group, which is defined by the elevated and circular fastening plates of these buckles. If the overall shape and the technical construction is stressed the group is highly homogenous, although it becomes quite heterogeneous if the individual ornamentation is taken into consideration. The buckle from Proosa constitutes a somewhat deviating feature within the group with regard to its larger and more organically shaped tongue. Furthermore, the construction of the buckle – where the frame and fastening plate are cast in one piece with a horizontal pin holding the tongue – also separates it from the rest.

High status buckles with inlaid almandine stones produced for the Huns by workshops in the Byzantine Empire are likely to have influenced the shaping of the Proosa group buckles. If the elevated and often circular or pelta-shaped fastening plate together with the heavyset tongue and frame are taken into consideration, the degree of morphological coherence between this type of buckle and the Proosa group is considerable. Furthermore, the buckle type clearly has inspired the shaping of many other contemporary and succeeding continental high status buckles as

well. The origin of the morphological properties of the fastening plate can possibly be found in two types of Roman buckles designated by Markus Sommer as buckles with bag- and shield-like fastening plates (Sommer 1984: 18–21, 30). Furthermore, the distinct arched shapes of the tongues on the Sjørup, Snartemo and Nydam IV buckles can likely be seen as an influence from the high status buckles often referred to as Gothic in the archaeological literature.

If the ornamentation is considered, features from the classical vegetative art executed in chip carving occur on all the Proosa group buckles except for the specimen from Finnestorp. It can be argued that the more complex and restrained chip carving patterns on the two Danish buckles in the Proosa group is closer to the chip carving on Provincial Roman buckles, while the simple spiral tendrils and palmettes occurring on the Sjørup and Snartemo buckles have more in common with corresponding artwork on Gothic high status buckles. The vegetative art on the Proosa buckle has different characteristics. It is executed in relief and holds a less prominent place in favour of the abundantly exhibited animal art of Salin's style I.

Besides placement and plasticity there is little that suggests a closer morphological bond between the human head terminations on the tongues of the Proosa and Finnestorp buckles. By way of analogies with the Punch puppet, the character of Pulcinella in the *Commedia dell'arte* and the characters of Maccus and Bucco in the Atellan farce, it is possible to interpret the human figure in the Proosa buckle as a trickster, which in mythology and the study of religion is a character who disobeys normal rules and norms of behaviour. In Old Norse mythology the god or giant Loki is by some scholars considered to be trickster, hence we may be presented with an image of Loki on the Proosa buckle. Furthermore, the presence of puzzle pictures on the tongue of the Proosa buckle – depicting four legged animals, a big bird's head and face masks – may also be seen as device by the artist to express the dualist nature of the trickster. In the Norse myths Loki is an adept shape-shifter with the ability to change both appearance and sex. However, with regard to the wide chronological gap, it must be stressed that the image on the Proosa buckle should be regarded as a proto-version of Loki which may have somewhat

different qualities than the Loki portrayed in the Icelandic sources.

The four legged animal on the tongue of the Proosa buckle is likely to have been modelled upon the animal on the corresponding part of the Snartemo buckle, due to the identical placement and composition. The plain space above the upper back of the Snartemo animal can be perceived as a mane and the curled up hind leg above the lower back can be looked upon as a merger of a tail and a leg. These are lion-like attributes which highlights the connection with the four legged animals occurring on late Roman chip-carved bronzes. Furthermore, the pear-shaped noose underneath the head of the Snartemo animal may indicate that the animal is tied to the buckle. A possible interpretation of the motif can be found in the myth from Norse mythology, in which the wolf Fenrir is tied with a magic rope by the Aesir.

The prominent function of the Proosa group buckles as part of the baldric should be observed as well. The supposedly high symbolical meaning of objects associated with sword and scabbard have earlier been discussed by Joachim Werner in relation to sword pommel rings and sword pearls (Werner 1953: 57; 1956: 26–37). Thus, it is possible that the boundary-transgressing properties of the trickster provide for the Proosa buckle to serve as a marker of the boundary between the sword and its carrier, the former representing death and the latter the world of the living. The trickster acts as a mediator between the two opposites (life and death) of which he retains a little bit of both, which create an ambiguous and equivocal character.

Finally, the relative dating of the Proosa group buckles will be considered. With reference to the dissolved animal art the buckle from Proosa must be regarded as the youngest specimen in the group. The less dissolved animal art suggests an earlier date for the Snartemo buckle which should also be looked upon as contemporary with the Sjørup buckles. Based on comparisons of the weaponry, the Snartemo specimen is likely to have been manufactured one generation later than the buckle from Nydam IV. The deposition of the Nydam IV-find has been dated to AD 470–480 but the buckle is likely to have been manufactured about AD 460 due to its rather worn condition. The buckle of unknown provenance from Denmark can

be viewed as roughly contemporary with the Nydam IV buckle with regard to the similar chip carving pattern within the sunken interior of the fastening plate. The lack of ornamentation from the classical vegetative art executed in chip carving, in favour of stamped ornamentation, may suggest the Finnestorp buckle is the oldest specimen in the Proosa group. The face mask on the tongue, which is similar to the face mask on the buckle from Jalta dating to the beginning of the 5th century AD, is another argument for an early dating. The author would like to propose a likely manufacturing date to about AD 450 for the Finnestorp buckle.

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