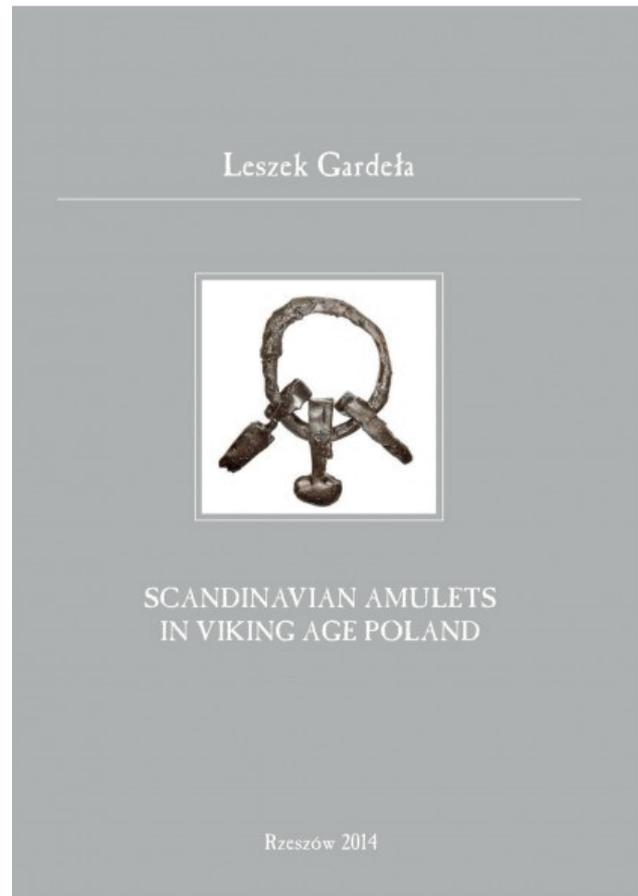


Leszek Gardeła: *Scandinavian Amulets in Viking Age Poland*, Collectio Archaeologica Ressoviensis 23. Fundacja Rzeszowskiego Ośrodka Archeologicznego, Instytut Archeologii Uniwersytetu Rzeszowskiego: Rzeszów, 2014. 166 pp. inc. catalogue and bibliography.

S*candinavian Amulets in Viking Age Poland*, a slim but ambitious volume, is the result of a research project undertaken by Leszek Gardeła in 2014, entitled ‘Viking Age Amulets in Poland’. In this book, Gardeła not only presents and analyses the potentially Scandinavian amulets found within present-day Poland, but also provides introductions to Viking Studies in Poland and Scandinavians in Viking Age Poland, as well as amulet studies in a Viking context. Gardeła maintains a careful balancing act, endeavoring to make his text accessible to non-specialists (including non-academics) while at the same time providing a level of specificity that will also satisfy specialist readers. In addition to the stated central aim of critically reviewing the ‘full corpus of Viking Age Scandinavian amulets discovered in [--] Poland’ (p. 10), Gardeła lays the groundwork for a fundamental reassessment of historical and archaeological research on Scandinavian-Slavic interactions in the 9th-11th centuries.



This second aim forms the focus of the first chapter, ‘Viking Age Archaeology in Poland: History of Research and Reception’. Improving communications between Polish and international scholars is clearly important to Gardeła, and as a first step towards this he provides a critical background to the current state of Viking research in Poland. Gardeła covers a staggering amount of ground in this chapter: From the “Viking inspirations” of the 19th century he charts the development of Viking studies as a discipline in Poland through the 20th century to the present day. Following thereupon he provides a summary of Scandinavian presence in Poland, reaching back to the first millennium AD but focusing on the Viking Age. Evidence for Viking-Slavic interactions concentrates mainly in the Scandinavian ports of trade on or near the Baltic coast; the presence of ethnically Scandinavian burials at various sites in Poland has been claimed, but Gardeła argues convincingly that in many of these cases (with, however, some notable exceptions, such as Elbląg)

currently available evidence does not support attribution to Viking Age Scandinavians. Gardęła notes that the presence of Vikings remains to be theorized, and although he lays solid groundwork for such an approach, he at times attempts to provide too much information in too short a space. This occasionally results in the introduction of new or complex concepts that remain somewhat underdeveloped. With the second chapter Gardęła shifts his focus towards amulets. He begins by developing a working definition of ‘amulet’ with the aid of previous scholarship (in particular that of Miriam Koktvedgaard Zeiten), and providing a history of research on amulets, before moving on with a presentation of amulet finds in Scandinavia itself and presenting the major categorical types of amulets that they comprise. The typologies appear largely in list form, with more extensive explication following in footnotes. Such detailed and particular discussion leads somewhat abruptly to a subchapter on amulets and their place in Viking worldviews. More concrete than worldviews is his presentation of Viking Age amulets ‘in action’, wherein Gardęła discusses how amulets were made (highlighting the present-day efforts of craftworkers and re-enactors) and whether the process might have been seen as more of a technical or ritual process. Gardęła also discusses the place of amulets on the body, living as well as dead, though he shies away from more interpretative remarks at this point in the monograph.

Although the first two chapters are by no means insignificant, both in terms of their content and in terms of the proportion of the book they occupy, the third chapter is where Gardęła’s focus clearly lies. Here the reader finds a detailed presentation and analysis of the Scandinavian-style amulets (and putative Scandinavian-style amulets) found in Viking Age Poland (defined in the previous chapter as within the modern territorial boundary of the country). The amulets are presented typologically, roughly sequenced according to frequency. Thus it becomes immediately clear that the most plentiful Scandinavian amulets found in Poland – as elsewhere in the Viking world – are Thor’s hammers of various materials and types. The next most populated category is that of the miniature figures, of which the Polish artefacts are nearly all humanoid female figures. These female figures have often been interpreted as Valkyries, but Gardęła observes that this association is often uncritically made, and that female anthropomorphic figures could potentially refer to a variety of female supernatural figures, or even have no direct relationship to any mythological concepts at all.

The following sections are somewhat more diverse, in the sense that they include not only clearly Scandinavian artefacts, or artefacts with clearly Scandinavian elements, but also artefacts that are more ambiguous in their cultural influence, or are unambiguously Slavic or non-Scandinavian. Gardęła’s careful contextualization makes sure that the reader understands why and how these artefacts are relevant to the broader discussion of Scandinavian amulets in Poland. For example, when he discusses ambiguously Scandinavian artefacts, Gardęła compares finds from Poland, Scandinavia, and even Anglo-Saxon England; he also draws upon Old Norse textual sources to reassess the supposed Scandinavian character of these more contentious artefacts. Gardęła’s descriptions are detailed and erudite, including contextualization with available textual evidence, and he illustrates them with high-quality, multiple-perspective images.

The main thrust of Gardęła’s interpretative analysis follows in chapter four. After summarizing the broad trends of Scandinavian amulets in Viking Age Poland, he contextualizes amulets within

other evidence for Scandinavian pre-Christian belief systems from Poland. He emphasizes that all Scandinavian amulets from Poland have been found in settlement contexts, rather than as grave goods or personal ornaments in graves. Amulets with identifiable Scandinavian attributes also concentrate in areas with the important ports of trade, such as Truso and Wolin. Also very interesting is the discussion and comparison of Scandinavian and West Slavic amulets, which is challenged by the fact that no synthesis of West Slavic amulets has been produced, the way that it has for Scandinavian amulets, and what has been published remains almost exclusively in Polish and thus difficult for those who do not read this language to access. However, this has clear potential for future research, and Gardęła observes that recent discoveries and ongoing excavations mean that more studies of Scandinavian artefacts and presence in Poland, which contextualize both new and existing material in a broader regional and cultural context.

Gardęła includes a full catalogue of Scandinavian amulets found in Viking Age Poland. As in chapter three, the artefacts are arranged by type, and information presented includes the location of the find, specific categorization of type, inventory number, dating, find context (though in many cases this is unknown), artefact dimensions, weight, a brief description and additional comments where relevant, as well as references to where the artefact has been published. Following the catalogue, Gardęła provides a detailed summary of his study in Polish.

Terms not in English are translated throughout (and common terms in esp. Polish and German are supplied where relevant). Titles in the bibliography are not translated. The text is supported by high-quality color images, and both the catalogue and in-text references to particular artifacts list catalogue and figure number. The text would have benefitted from additional proofreading and is occasionally somewhat repetitive. However, these are minor quibbles that do not detract significantly from what is a lucid analysis and important contribution to Viking Studies – within the context of Polish archaeology, certainly, but without a doubt significant for the field as a whole.

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