

# A SCANDINAVIAN TRACE: A BEAK FIBULA FROM THE LATE MIGRATION PERIOD CEMETERY AT NOWINKA IN NORTHERN POLAND\*

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## Abstract

This paper presents an item that has been mentioned in archaeological literature a few times, but never in a detailed analysis: the beak brooch from grave 38 in the cemetery of the Elbląg group at Nowinka. It is a south Scandinavian import that came to northern Poland around the middle of the sixth century, but was in use for quite a long time, which is suggested by traces of wear, as well as introducing a hinge construction that is untypical of that type.

Key words: beak brooch, Nowinka, the Elbląg group, Migration Period, Scandinavia.

The cemetery at Nowinka, Tolkmicko com., is attributed to the Elbląg group of the West Balt Circle (Okulicz 1973, p.471; 1989, pp.89-90), and the name is generally accepted by scholars, although there are opinions that this group was subordinate to a cultural unit from the Sambian-Natangian area called Dollkeim-Kovrovo culture by W. Nowakowski (Nowakowski 1996, pp.96-97; Bitner-Wróblewska 2001, pp.21-25, 132), or that it indicates the mixed Balt-German-Scandinavian character of the culture of that area, resulting in its lack of an independent character (Bitner-Wróblewska 2008, p.109). So far, it is the only necropolis of this cultural unit that has been wholly excavated since the Second World War. It is in a state of preparation to be printed; nevertheless, single papers concerning it have been published (Pietrzak 1977; Kontny, Okulicz, Pietrzak 2009; Okulicz, Pietrzak 2009; Kontny 2010). The necropolis yielded several items of great interest, proving obviously foreign influences, namely belt parts and brooches. One of them was found in grave 38. It was a cremation pit burial with the remains of a pyre and the remnants of a pavement disturbed by ploughing. At its centre, a brooch, a piece of a bronze ring, a piece of an amber bead, and several uncharacteristic pieces of a clay vessel were found. According to an anthropological analysis done by Professor J. Gładykowska-Rzeczycka of the Centre for Anatomy and Anthropology at the Śniadecki Academy of Physical Education and Sport in Gdańsk, the human remains belonged to a child.

The bronze beak brooch has a hinge construction (Fig. 1-3). The profiled bow was cast together with pseudo-cord and pseudo-spring (shallow incisions imitate the spring). On the imitation cord, a hole was made, probably to attach a chain. The bronze pin was attached by the wider end to an iron axle, which was fixed on either

side in socket-shaped parts of the imitation spring. The catchplate is solid and low. The bow is decorated with pearl-like lines along the edges; in the centre, there is a triple pearl-like line, blurred in the upper part (clearly, we are dealing with traces of wear). The zones delimited by the pearl-like lines are filled with lengthwise rows of alternating stamped triangles inside the triangles, is a texture of regularly distributed dots. On the foot is an imitation cord decoration of stamped circles. The dimensions of the brooch are as follows: length 4.6 centimetres, width 2.8 centimetres.

The brooch has already been mentioned in literature (Godłowski 1980, p.83, Fig. 15.2; Godłowski 1981, p.114, Fig. 28a; Kulakov 1990, p.62, Plate VI.3; Kowalski 1991, p.77; Jagodziński 1997, Pl. IX.1; Bogucki 2006, p.101, Fig. 10). It was generally described as proving Scandinavian influence (Godłowski 1980, p.83; Godłowski 1981, p.114; Kowalski 1991, p.77; Bogucki 2006, p.101). Nevertheless, no further analysis has so far been offered.

The beak fibula from grave 38 generally fits the Scandinavian model (Fig. 4.1-3),<sup>1</sup> but a comparison with Scandinavian finds shows that brooches from there have almost only crossbow constructions of iron wire, in which the cord is placed between socket-shaped fas-

\* This paper was written as part of a research grant from the Ministry of Science and Information Technology: 'The burial ground of the Elbląg group from the West Balts Cultural Circle at Nowinka, Tolkmicko com. The complete study and preparation for the publication' (Project No.: N N109 0362 33; Contract No.: 0362/B/H03/2007/33. It is financed by the Fund for Science for the years 2007-2010. I would like to express my gratitude to Mirosław Pietrzak MA and Professor Jerzy Okulicz-Kozaryn, with whom I have worked in research on the cemetery at Nowinka, for letting me present the results of my analysis here.

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Ørsnes 1966, p.296.

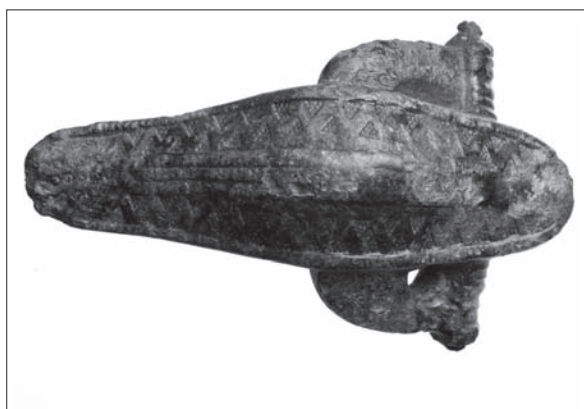


Fig. 1. The beak brooch from grave 38 at Nowinka: the outer side (photograph by Michał Dąbski, Miron Bogacki).



Fig. 2. The beak brooch from grave 38 at Nowinka: the inner side (photograph by M. Dąbski, M. Bogacki).



Fig. 3. The beak brooch from grave 38 at Nowinka: a detail of the decoration (photograph by M. Dąbski, M. Bogacki).

tenings of the axle.<sup>2</sup> It is also worth noting the presence of stamped (triangles and dots) and pseudo-pearl-like decoration on the bow, and pseudo-pearl-like decoration on the pseudo-cord. Also, the hole, which was probably used for attaching a decorative element, such as a chain, should be noted. Although the grave goods did not contain links (except for a piece of a ring of twisted bronze wire), such uses of beak brooches have been confirmed for Bornholm cemeteries in Nørre Sandegård Vest, grave 54 (Jørgensen, Nørgård Jørgensen 1997, p.41, Plate 21:54) and perhaps also in Bækkegård, grave 14 (Jørgensen 1990, p.119, Plate 4.14). The brooch from Nowinka represents variant G1<sup>3</sup>, with holes for fixing the axle in the pseudo-spring (Ørsnes 1966, p.296, Figs. 101-103; Høilund Nielsen 1987, p.76). Such forms are especially typical of southern Scandinavia, i.e., the Jutland Peninsula, the Danish islands, Skåne and Gotland (Høilund Nielsen 2000, p.163, Fig. 3). They were particularly frequent on Bornholm and Skåne, e.g., in Uppåkra, Uppåkra sn. A total of 132 beak brooches were registered by 1998 (Hårdh 1999) and around 180 by 2001 (Hårdh 2001, Fig. 5), and they had the closest analogies in Bornholm, cf. Sorte Muld, Bornholms amt (Hårdh 1999; cf. Lund Hansen 2009, pp.68-69). On the basis of the technical details, they can be classified in two groups: a western and an eastern one, including Bornholm and Skåne (Hårdh 2001; 2002, pp.47-48).

Brooches of this type are also known from other sites of the Elbląg group: recently two brooches of the type were discovered during rescue excavations in Janów Pomorski (Truso), Elbląg com.,<sup>4</sup> and two more in the cemetery at Komorowo Żuławskie, Elbląg com. (they are later, and they could be determined as type G3<sup>5</sup>). A very late form comes from a 'Viking' assemblage from grave 41 at the Elbląg-Pole Nowomiejskie cemetery, site 37 (Neugebauer 1938, Fig. 6.f; 1975, Fig. 3; Jagodziński 1997, p.69, Plate XIV.9). Late forms were

<sup>2</sup> The result of inquiries I conducted in the National Museum in Copenhagen and the Bornholm Museum in Rønne. I would like to express my gratitude to Professor Poul Otto Nielsen (National Museum in Copenhagen, or NMK) and to Professor Finn Ole Nielsen and Maria Tuniszewska-Ringby MA (Bornholm Museum in Rønne, or BM) for giving me access to items stored in the above museums.

<sup>3</sup> It was probably variant G1c, but the decoration, on the basis of which these brooches are determined as respective variants, does not have exact analogies in Scandinavia (cf. Ørsnes 1966, p.296; Høilund Nielsen 1987, p.76).

<sup>4</sup> One of them had almost identical decoration on the bow as the item from Nowinka; the pseudo-cord, however, has different decoration (the remaining brooches are too poorly preserved for it to be possible to analyse their decoration).

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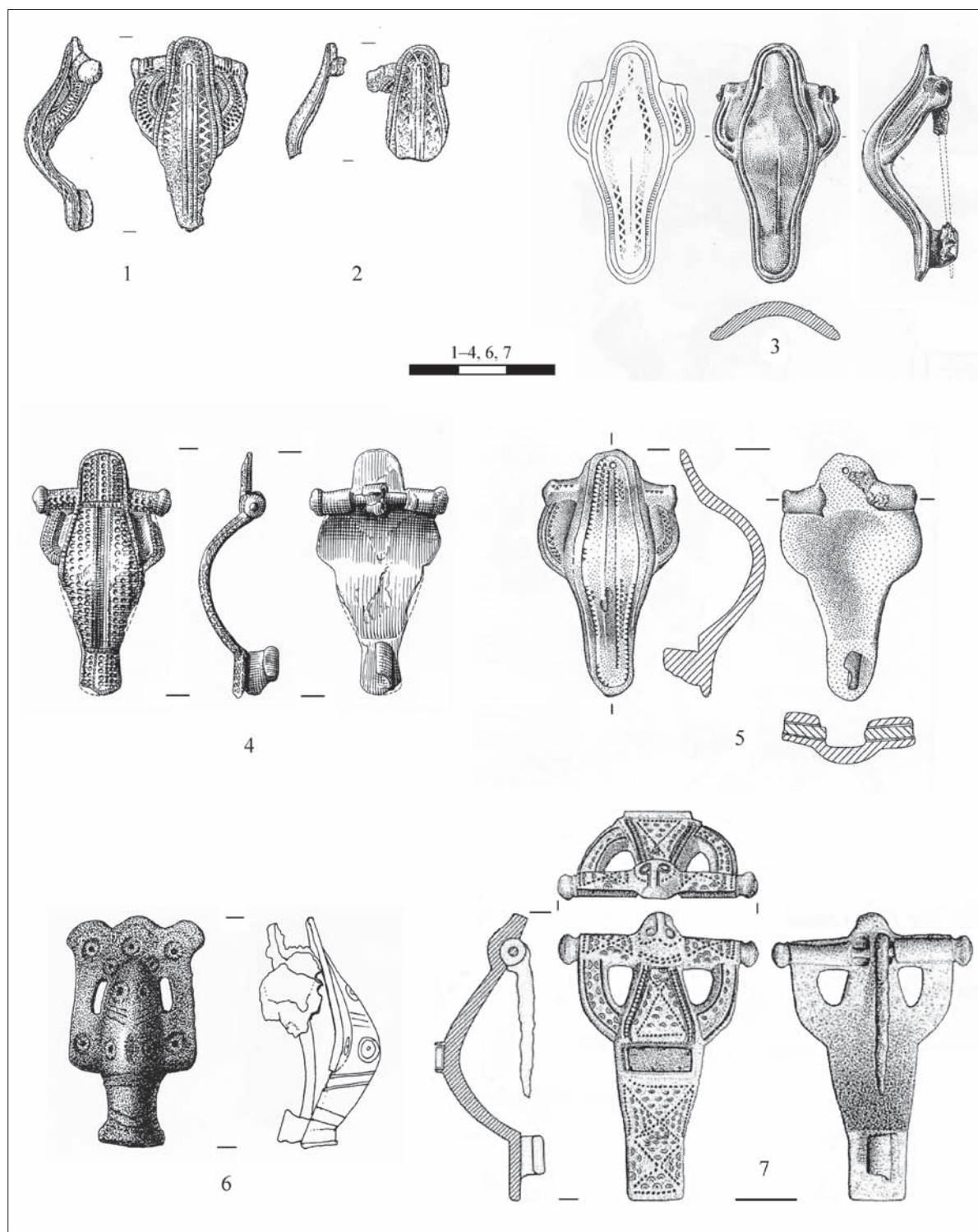


Fig. 4. Examples of beak brooches (1-5), crayfish fibulae (6), and a proto-animal-head fibula: 1, 2 Bækkegård, grave 'b' (after Jørgensen 1990, Plate 2.7-8); 3 Nørre Sandegård Vest, grave 22 (after Jørgensen, Nørgård Jørgensen 1997, Plate 11.1); 4 Wulfen, stray find (after Schmidt 1976, Plate 64:1.1); 5 Menzlin an der Peene, settlement find, not to scale (after Jöns 2006, Fig. 11.3); 6 Vainionmäki (after P. Purhonen 1996, Plate 2.3); 7 TÁC-Fövenypusztá, grave 6 (after L. Schilling 2009, Fig. 4).



also sporadically found in other formally Balt sites, although they are Scandinavian in character, or at least with a strong Scandinavian influence, cf. Grobiņa, Rudzukulni I, Liepāja district, grave I from the mid-seventh century (Nerman 1958; Bogucki 2006, pp.95, 97, Fig. 3). Also, local Balt imitations were discovered: Grobiņa, Rudzukulni, Liepāja district, grave 3 and Priediens 2, Liepāja district, grave 5 (Bogucki 2006, p.97, Fig. 5.2-3). Inasmuch as the brooch from Priediens may have indeed been a local imitation, due to its ornamentation (although similar motifs, such as stamped concentric arches, can also be found in Scandinavia, such as the stray find from Møllegård on Bornholm, NMK inv. no. C31832), the item from Rudzukulni may be a Scandinavian form (the suggested differences in construction can hardly be considered as definitive, especially as they have not been explained in detail, cf. Bogucki 2006, p.97). Theoretically, Scandinavian beak brooches may have been locally copied, or they may even be a starting point for gradual changes in the forms of respective generations of fibulae, which is suggested by the crayfish brooches (Fig. 4.6) that were popular in western Finland in the seventh and eighth centuries (Purhonen 1996, pp.37-38) which formed from beak brooches. The local imitation of beak fibula is also proven for as distant a region as the Avar cemetery at Tács-Fövenypuszta (Fig. 4.7), where in grave 6, dated to the late sixth or early seventh century, a surely locally made item was found (Schilling 2009, pp.265-266, 268, Fig. 4). It was made of gilded bronze with glass inlay, and there was an image of an animal head between its arms. However, there are no grounds to believe that a mechanism of gradual alterations existed in the case of the Elbląg group.

So far, they have not been found, e.g., in the Olsztyn group. Besides, beak brooches are known from the Elbe region (Fig. 4.4, 5): Menzlin an der Peene, Lkr. Ostvorpommern (Mangelsdorf, Rausch 2000), an item linked with Scandinavian influence documented for that trading settlement (Jöns 2006, p.127, Fig. 11.3), two items from Wulfen, Lkr. Anhalt-Bitterfeld (Schmidt 1961, p.133, Plate 30.k, l; 1976, p.85, Plate 64.1.1-2; 2005, p.410, Fig. 5.2, 4) and the ones from Altenzaun, Kläden, Sanne and Unglingen<sup>6</sup> (Schmidt 2005, p.410). We should add here also the find from Usedom, Lkr. Ostvorpommern (Schoknecht 2008, pp.123-126). They are treated as Scandinavian imports from the second half of the sixth century (Schmidt 1961, p.133) to circa 600 AD, which is tentatively linked with the influx of Scandinavian population to the central Elbe region through Mecklenburg (Schmidt 2005, pp.414, 417).

In Scandinavia, brooches of this type are found in women's graves (Jørgensen 1990, pp.30-31; Jørgensen, Nørgård Jørgensen 1997, p.41). In the case of the item from Nowinka, the sex of the dead child buried here has not been determined, so it is impossible to confirm this principle for that area.

There arises the question whether the item from Nowinka is an import or a local imitation. It is most likely that it is an imported artefact, which is suggested by the discovery of two brooches almost identical to the find from Nowinka, type G1c, in grave 'b' from Bækkegård on Bornholm (Jørgensen 1990, pp.30, 117, Plate 2.7-8). They have the same stamps and arrangement of the decoration as in the case of the item from Nowinka (more similar than in the case of the find from Janów Pomorski mentioned above), and there are more analogies on Bornholm (Bornholms amt): stray finds from Sandegård (unpublished, NMK inv. no C31512, BM inv. no 1371x43), Rabekkegård (unpublished, NMK inv. no C32554, BM inv. no 1764x4), Mulebygård (unpublished, BM inv. no 2812x106),<sup>7</sup> and from Skåne, Önsvala, grave 2 (Hårdh 2001, pp.193, 204, Fig. 7). However, there is a surprising difference in the construction of the fastening: it seems that a different solution (hinge construction) and raw material (bronze) was used, because the brooch was locally repaired; also, the imitation of the spring in the form of notchings on the caps in which the axle was fixed was probably added by a local craftsman. This could be a result of the long and continuous use of the fibula, which seems to be confirmed by a blurring of the decoration in the upper part of the bow (traces of wear).

The beak fibula from Nowinka was similarly dated to the chronology of the necropolis, i.e., to the second half of the sixth century and the first half of the seventh century (Godłowski 1980, pp.82-83; Godłowski 1981, p.114), but also to the middle of the sixth century (Bogucki 2006, p.101) or the seventh century (Kulakov 1990, p.62). Kowalski places it in the period equivalent to phase E<sub>2b</sub> of the Olsztyn group (1991, p.77), i.e., from the Seventies of the sixth century up to the early seventh century (Kowalski 1991, p.77, Fig. 8). These proposals demand some rearrangement. In the Scandinavian area, such forms are considered to be characteristic of phase VIIA after K. Høilund Nielsen, and dated to 530-600 AD (Høilund Nielsen 2000, pp.162-163), or phases 1A-1C distinguished for the area of Bornholm, dated to 540 to circa 630 AD (Jørgensen, Nørgård Jørgensen 1997, p.41, Figs. 24, 26). On Bornholm, brooches of type G1 occurred only in phases 1A-1B, i.e., from 520/30 to 600 AD (Jørgensen 1990, p.30; Jørgensen, Nørgård Jørgensen 1997, p.28,

<sup>6</sup> All: Lkr. Stendal.

<sup>7</sup> In the last-mentioned case, besides the triangular stamps, rhomboid ones were used.

Figs. 18, 24, 26). Unfortunately, the closest analogies, i.e., brooches from Bækkegård and Janów Pomorski, were not accompanied by any other dating elements (Jørgensen 1990, p.117), which makes it impossible to establish any more precise chronology. Grave 38, in which the fibula in question was found, could be cautiously attributed to phase 1 of the cemetery at Nowinka, which is linked with the second third of the sixth century (Kontny, Okulicz-Kozaryn, Pietrzak, forthcoming). These observations suggest that the brooch came to the area occupied by the Elbląg group as early as the sixth century. Nevertheless, if it is assumed that the fastening was repaired after the long-term use of the object (which is also suggested by traces of wear visible on the bow), then perhaps the later part of the time span should be excluded. Therefore, it was put in the ground probably in the later part of the second third of the sixth century. However, we cannot exclude the possibility that it came here quite late in the above time span, and was in use for an even longer period than we assume (the lack of other precisely dating elements in the grave furnishings makes us base our judgement only on the relative chronology of the Nowinka cemetery). Despite this, it seems improbable to link it with the seventh century.

The find from grave 38 shows that Scandinavian elements came to northern Poland as early as the middle of the sixth century, i.e., before the peak of the wealth of the population using the necropolis at Nowinka, which could be joined with its third chronological phase (dated to the early seventh century: Kontny, Okulicz-Kozaryn, Pietrzak, forthcoming). It seems to be of great interest also to Lithuanian scholars, since foreign, including Scandinavian, influences have been traced here.

Translated by Sylwia Twardo and Bartosz Kontny

#### Abbreviation:

Transformatio mundi – Transformatio mundi The Transition from the Late Migration Period to the Early Viking Age in the East Baltic. M. Bertašius, ed. Kaunas, 2004.

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## SKANDINAVIŠKAS PĖDSAKAS: VĖLYVOJO TAUTŲ KRAUSTYMOŠI LAIKOTARPIO SEGĖ SU SNAPO FORMOS ATAUGOMIS IŠ NOWINKA KAPINYNO ŠIAURĖS LENKIJOJE

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### Santrauka

Straipsnyje apžvelgiama archeologinėje literatūroje minima, bet detaliau neanalizuota Elbląg grupei priklausanči Nowinka kapinyno kape 38 aptikta unikali segė, užsibaigianti snapo formos ataugomis (1–3 pav.).

Ši segė yra importuota iš Skandinavijos ir pasiekusi Šiaurės Lenkijos teritoriją VI a. viduryje dar prieš laidosenos piką Nowinka kapinyne; ji siejama su trečiąja kapinyno chronologine faze VII a. pr. Tokių segių aptikta ir kituose Elbląg grupės kapinynuose. Dvi jų pastaruoju metu aptiktos Janów Pomorski (Truso) ir dar dvi Komorowo Żuławskie kapinynuose. Skandinavijoje šio tipo segių aptinkama moterų kapuose. Mini-mu atveju Nowinka kapinyno kape 38 buvo palaidotas nenustatytos lyties vaikas.

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Received: 13 September 2010; Revised: 18 November 2010; Accepted: 28 December 2010.

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