

# FROM THE BALTIC TO THE DANUBE: EARLY ROMAN IRON AGE WARRIORS FROM HAGENOW, MECKLENBURG, AND THEIR RELATIONS WITH THE BARBARIAN AND ROMAN WORLDS

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## Abstract

At the Early Roman Iron Age graveyard of Hagenow, Mecklenburg, five or six generations of an elite manifest rank and status through the burial custom, among other things using weapons and components of military equipment. The wealth and quality of the grave goods obvious based on the participation in Germanic retinues and also in Roman services.

Key words: cremation graves, weapons, spurs, Marcomannic wars.

## Introduction

As a part of the lower Elbe area, west Mecklenburg is well known for some important cemeteries of the Pre-Roman Iron Age and the Early Roman Iron Age. Of special interest is the cemetery at Hagenow, Ludwigslust county, southwest of the provincial capital Schwerin (Fig. 1). Here 27 bronze vessels, or rather vessel fragments, as well as the remains of a silver cup were found in only 17 graves from the first and second century AD. Ten out of 18 graves of this period contain weapons and military equipment, among which are some rare or exceptional pieces both of Roman and native origin (Fig. 2). The completely preserved and accurately examined weapon grave 9/1995 from around 100 AD, together with the remaining burials, gives us an important insight into the armament and equipment of Germanic equestrian warriors (Lüth *et al.* 2000).

For the lower Elbe area during the Pre-Roman Iron Age we do not yet have a definite explanation for the

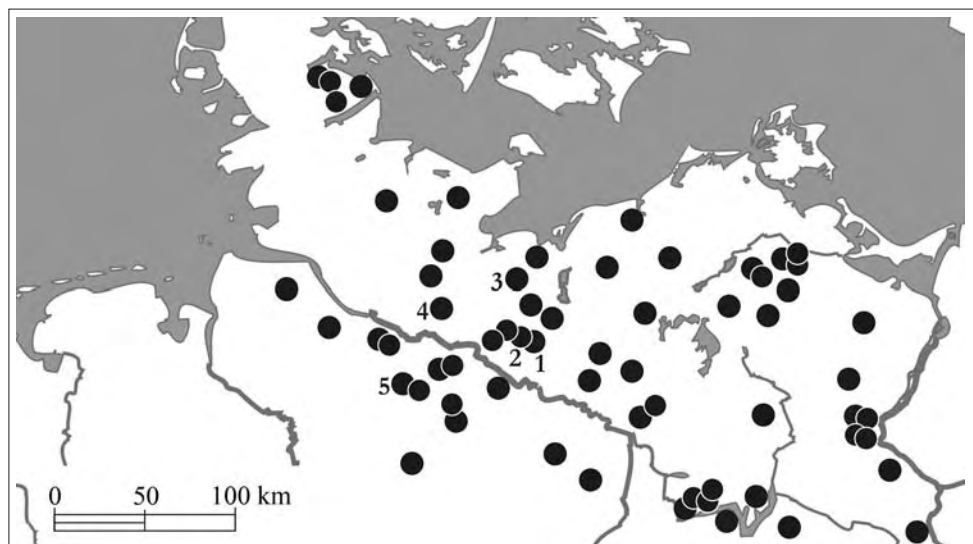
emergence of the burial custom of depositing weapons in the graves. Influences from the regions east of the River Oder, which spread to central Germany first and then down the River Elbe, as well as influences from the north from Jutland, are discussed (Schultze 1986, p.95ff.; Adler 1993, p.222ff.; Eger 1999, p.153ff.).

## Celtic and Roman influence

The oldest grave complexes of the cemetery in Hagenow date back to the reign of Emperor Claudius (41–54). Even older is an unfortunately incompletely recovered find complex from 1841/42, which originally may have been two graves. It contains a lance, spear, bronze shield grip and a spur, as well as bronze dishes of high quality (Voß 2005, p.24ff., Abb. 5).

Already the bronze shield grip indicates an above average equipment level. Comparable are the grave of a Germanic *Auxiliar* of Mehrum near the Rhine (Fig.

Fig. 1. The lower Elbe area. Weapon graves of the Early Roman Iron Age. 1 Hagenow; 2 Körchow, Ludwigslust county; 3 Holdorf, Nordwestmecklenburg county; 4 Hamfelde, Herzogtum Lauenburg county; 5 Putensen, Harburg county.



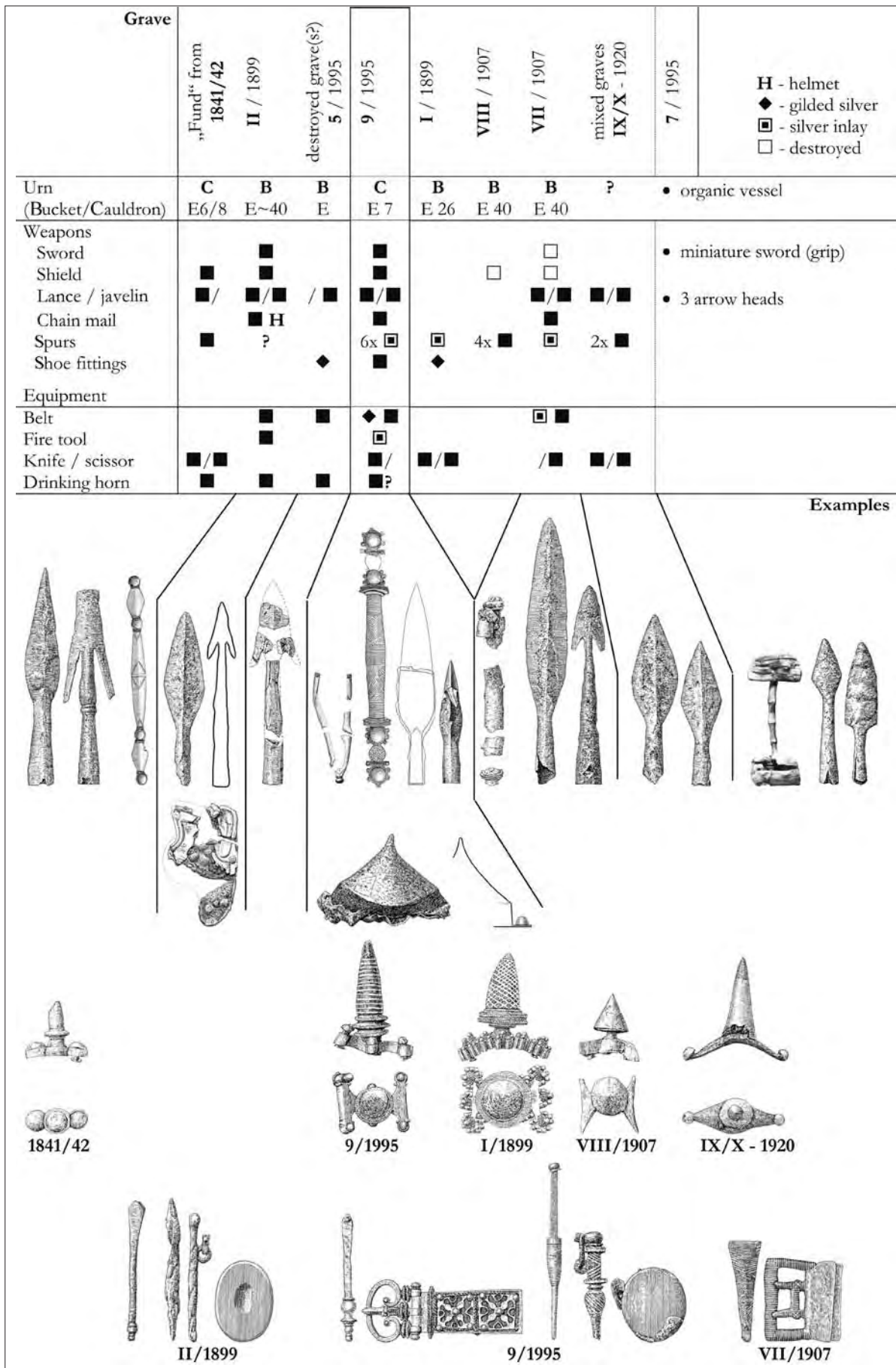


Fig. 2. Hagenow, “Römergräber” site. Equipment patterns of weapon graves. Without scale (drawings by J. Seele, Schwerin; photograph by S. Suhr, Wiligrad).

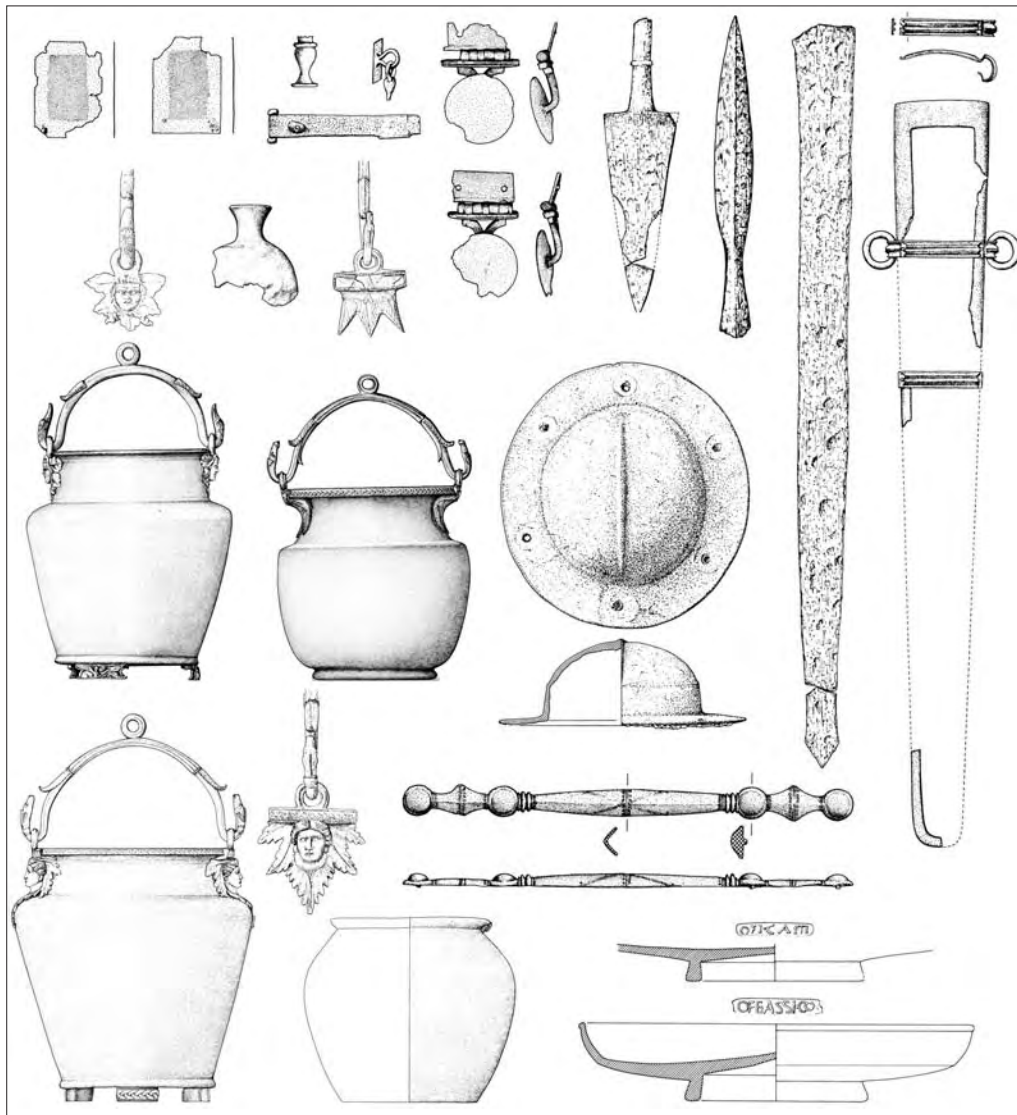


Fig. 3. Mehrum, Wesel county, grave of a Germanic *Auxiliar* (after Gechter and Kunow 1983).

3), in the northwest of the Ruhr Valley, from around 50–60 AD (Gechter, Kunow 1983), and grave V in Dobrichov-Pichora in Bohemia (Droberjar 1999, p.220ff., Taf. 14-17) which is also richly equipped with bronze Roman objects.

The grave good assemblages of these two reconstructed burials correspond in some elements to the graves of the Gallo-Roman elite of the Augustan and Tiberian era. Common are bronze dishes, among them the characteristic iron-edged cauldron, as well as the complete armament, consisting of sword, lance, spear and shield, and furthermore spurs (eg Ferdier, Vaillard 1993). Contacts between Celtic tribes from Gaul and Germanic groups from the River Elbe probably date back to at least the time of the Gallic war (Adler 1993, p.221; Eger 1999, p.153).

First let us have a look at the Roman elements of the equipment, a Roman equestrian warrior Weiler type helmet and three sets of chain mail. Together with the full armament of sword, lance, spear and shield, as

well as three bronze drinking horn mountings and fragments of different bronze vessels, they originate from an unfortunately incomplete traditional weapon grave of the late first century AD.

Weiler type Helmets were worn by Roman soldiers from the 1st until the early second century (Feugère 1993, p.104ff., Fig.109). As grave goods, they are found in west Celtic burials and graves of the *Suebi Nicreti* in southwest Germany (Lenz-Bernhard 1999, Abb. 25), an area in which also iron-edged cauldrons have been discovered in burial deposits (Peschel 1995, p.78). Hagenow is the only grave find with a helmet in the Elbe area and beyond. In addition, the occurrence of completely or almost completely preserved chain mail in three weapons graves in a single cemetery is extraordinary.

In southern Scandinavia and western Mecklenburg, chain mail already appears in graves of the late Republican and the Augustan Period; however, with a ring diameter of only five millimetres, these pieces are proba-



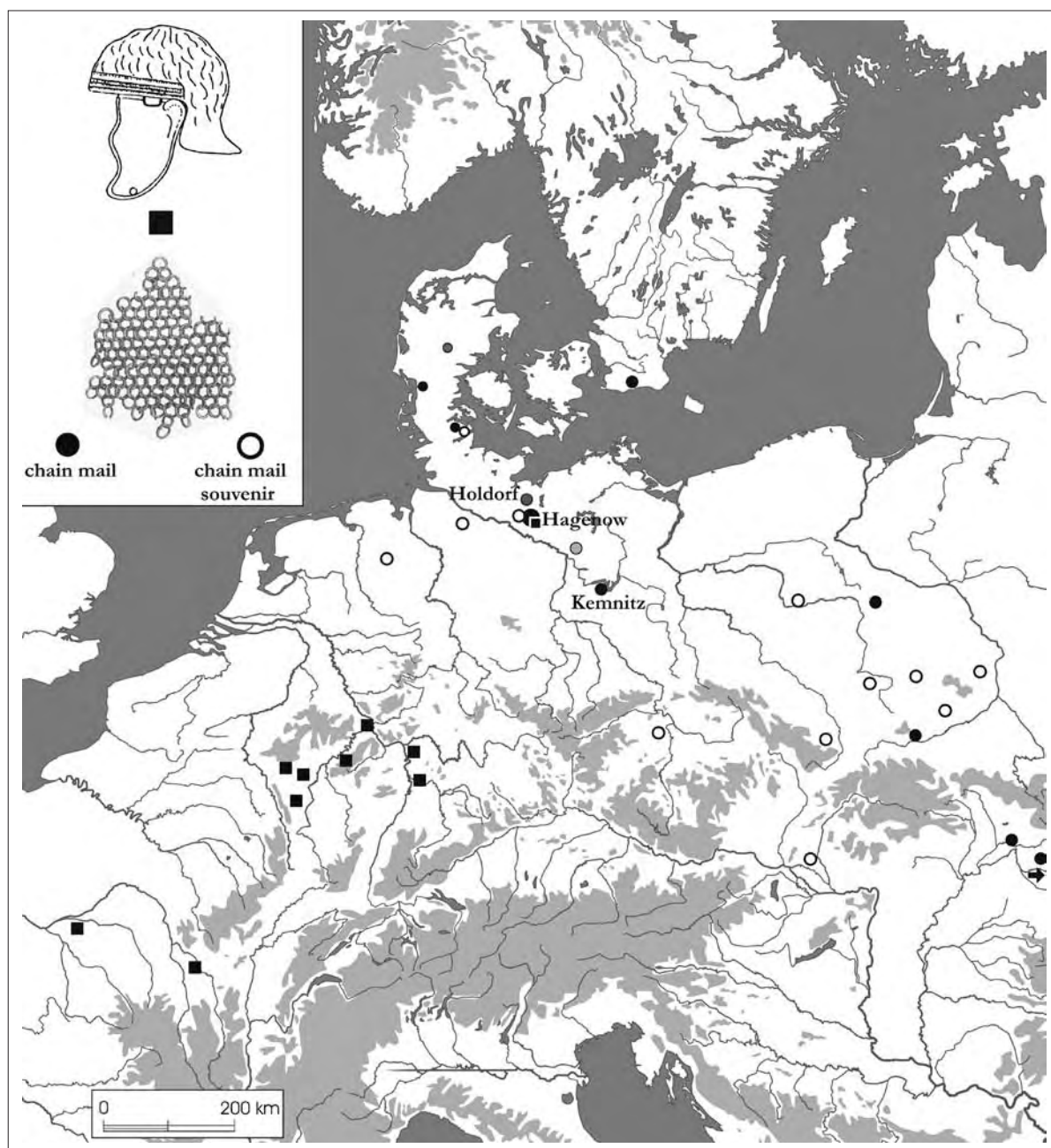


Fig. 4. Weiler type helmets and chain mail in Late Pre-Roman and Early Roman Iron Age graves (after Hansen 2003; Kaczanowski 1994; Lenz-Bernhard 1999).

bly products of Celtic origin (Hansen 2003, p.43, Figs. 11-15). A good example is grave A 4137 in Hedegård in Mid-Jutland (Madsen 1996/97 p.85, Figs. 27; 28) and a grave with a bronze cauldron in Holdorf in north-west Mecklenburg (Voß 1998, p.47, II-02-4/1.3).

As in the helmet grave from Hagenow found in 1899, the bearer of the chain mail in grave VII excavated in 1907 and the warrior of grave 9/1995 were also armed with sword, spear and lance, as well as a shield. The 55-year-old man buried around 100 AD in grave 9/1995, as well as the man deceased around the middle of the second century and buried in grave VII, were equestrian warriors. The spurs among the grave goods indicate

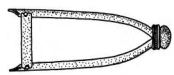
that clearly. Another important part of their equipment are the belt buckles and accessories.

#### The equipment of a high-ranking warrior

Grave 9/1995 contained next to the sword belt a silver Cingulum and a figurative, partially gilded magnificent belt (Lüth *et al.* 2000, p.173ff. Abb. 18, 19). An until today unique silver-inlayed belt buckle with a twin-spiked buckle (Madyda-Legutko 1987, p.54, 57ff., Taf. 17:44) and fitting strap end was discovered in grave VII. The detailed examination of grave 9/1995 carried out in the laboratory of the archaeological state collec-

	AMannersdorf, Grab v. 1988	CZ Dobřichov- Pichora, I	CZ Dobřichov- Pichora, VI	D Bornitz FK 29	D Putensen Grab 150	PL Domaradzice Grab 1	SK Kostolná Grab 35	D Hagenow Grab 9/1995	D Körchow, Grab v. 1935	DK Brokær, Grab v. 1878
<b>Weapons: Sword</b>	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x/x	x(Ringknauf)
- Lance/javelin	x	x	x	x	x	x/x	x	x/x	x/x	
- Shield	x: SfAE	x	x: SfAE	x: SfFe	x, SfFe	x, SfFe	x SfFe	x, SfAE	x, SfAE	
Chain mail										
Spurs/(Knopfsporn)				2x	4x/2x	/x	1x	6x Ag-inlay	3x, 2xinlay	x/x
Shoe fittings				x				x	x	
<b>Metal vessels:</b>										
Cauldron	E7? (rim?)	E7	E8	E8	E8	E7	Imitation E8	E7	E8	E8
- Bucket			E38(?)							E27/28; E44
- Basin	(?)									E77
- Casserolles	E?(sheet m.)		E131	E131; E132	E134/5; 137		E 162(?)			AgE142/43?
- Dipper/strainer	(?)									2xE160/161
- Silver goblet										2x (Masken)
Drinking horn	AE			2x AE; (?Ag)	AE			? 2x Ag		Ag
Brooches										
- Almgren Group II			2x A 236		28, 2x 24, 37			2x ring broo.		
- Almgren Group III		III A; III, (?)	2x III;			III, 46				
- Almgren Group IV		2x 67	5x 67 (a.b)		2x 67; 69	68/69				
- Almgren Group V		AE NoPan	AE NoPan	x	Fe	Fe	AE	4x V, Ser. 9	V, Ser. 12 Var.	AE
Belt	AE; AE	AE NoPan	AE NoPan				Ag-inlay	Ag: AE/Ag	AE	AE
Fire tool	x(?)						Ag-inlay	Ag-inlay	(?)	
Finger ring		Au (I)						Fe/Ag	Au (I)	Au (I)
Knife	2x Fe		4x Fe	3x Fe	Fe	2x Fe	2x Fe	Fe/Ag	2x Fe	Fe
Scissor				x		x	x		x	x
Comb										
Needle		AE		x (Öhr)	Ag				4x Fe(?)	Kn
Dice/gaming piece		Au -pendant, spindle whorl	- / 14 x bear claw, arrowhead	textiles	textiles, leather	ceramics, whetstone		Au-ingot		cauldron, wooden bucket
Varia										2 / 1
State of preservation	original	mixed?	mixed?	original	original	original	original	original	original	original
Anthropology	m	m/w?	m	m, 25-30	M, 20-30	m	m, 41-60	M, ca. 55	m	m
Dating (phase)	B 1a	B 1a	B 1a	B 1a	B 1b	B 1b	B 2a	B 2a	B 2	B 2/C 1a

Table 1. Equipment pattern of weapon graves with iron-edged bronze cauldrons. AE – aes (copper and copper alloys); E – type after H.J. Eggers, Der römische Import im freien Germanien. Atlas der Urgeschichte 1 (Hamburg 1951); NoPan – belt garnitures from Noricum and Pannonia; Sf – shield grip. Brooches after O. Almgren, Studien über nordeuropäische Fibelformen der ersten nachchristlichen Jahrhunderte mit Berücksichtigung der provinzialrömischen und südrussischen Formen. (2. Aufl.) Mannus-Bibliothek 32 (Leipzig 1923). Sex: m, f – archaeologically determined; M – anthropologically determined



Origin, grave	Grave	Lance	Lance/Javelin	Shield	Shield grip	Spurs ▣ - silver ▣ inlay	Drinking horn	Metal vessel	Brooches after O. Almgren	State of preservation	Dating (phase)
S Stenstugu, Gotland	K	×	×	×	Fe					0	B 2
S Bengstorp, Öland, Grab 2	K	×	×	×	Fe					1	B 2
D Bordesholm, KS 10316	Depot?	×	×	×	AE/(Ag)		×			3	B 2
D Hamfelde, Grab 366	U	×	×	×	AE/(Ag)	5			V, Ser. 9?	3	B 2b
D Hagenow, Grab 9/1995	U	×	×	×	AE/Ag	6 ▣	▣	E 7	V, Ser. 9	3	B 2a
S Hörnige, Öland	K	×		×	AE/Ag	2				1	B 2
DK Kastrup, Jütland, Urne 2	U	×	×	×	Fe?	4	×	E 37/43		3	B 2b
D Kөрchow, Grab 120	U	×	×	×	Fe	3 (2 ▣)	×	E 160	V, Ser. 9	2?	B 2
D Bordesholm, Grab 1984	U	×		×	Fe	5 (2 ▣)	×		V, Ser. 9	3	B 2b
D Bordesholm, Grab 1534	U	×		×	Fe	6 (4 ▣)				3	B 2b
D Hamfelde, Grab 260	U	▣		×	Fe				V, Ser. 9?	3	B 2
D Kemnitz, Grab 252	U	×		×					V, Ser. 9	0	B 2
D Kөрchow, Grab 142	U	×								0	B 2
D Sörup, Grab 377	U		×			2				3	B 2
D Hamburg-Langenk, Grab +13	U?			×	Fe				V, Ser. 9	0	B 2
D Ehestorf-Vahrendorf, Grab 541	U?								I?	0	B 1b?

Table 2. Equipment pattern of graves with knob-ended scabbards. AE; E and brooches see table 1. K – inhumation grave; U – urn grave. State of preservation: 0 – destroyed, mixed find, incomplete. 1 – partially destroyed, incomplete. 2 – found in situ, later parts of the find mixed with others, 3 – original, complete find



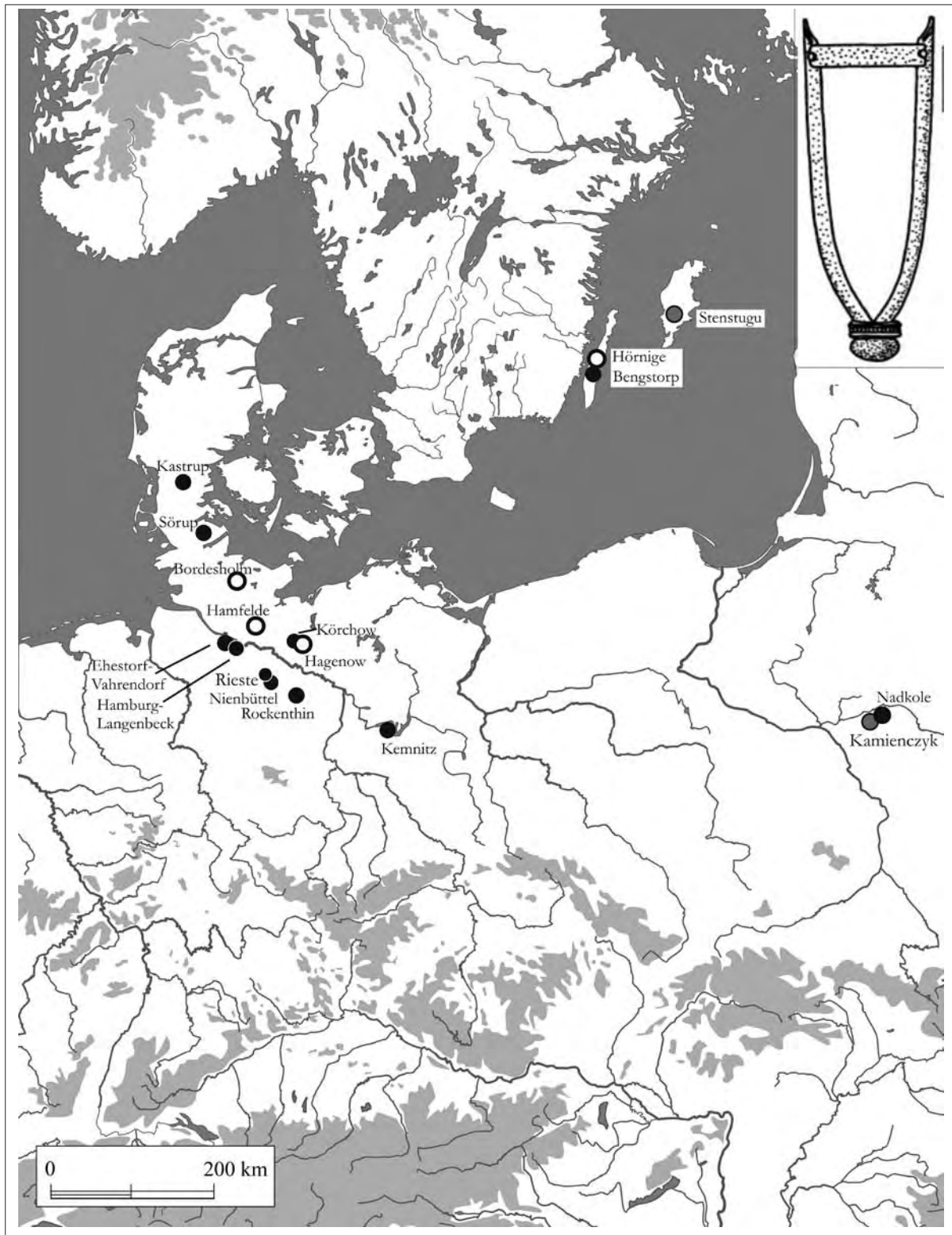


Fig. 5. Early Roman Iron Age graves with knob-ended scabbards (after Kaczanowski 1994). ○ - in combination with shield grips made of bronze and silver (see table 2).

tion in Munich gives important evidence on the burial rite. The cremated bone had been completely covered by the chain mail, and had probably been doused with mead. All weapons were intentionally destroyed, bent or broken, and were exposed to the burning pyre, as well as the sword belt, and the figurative decorated magnificent belt, but not the silver fittings of the waist belt or the spurs (Lüth *et al.* 2000, Tab. 1). The equipment pattern of grave 9/1995 with complete armament (armament group A after Adler 1993) and high-value personal equipment permits a comparison with either chronologically older or younger weapon graves. These were found from western Scandinavia down to the central Danube area. An example is burials with iron-edged bronze cauldrons, which were used as urns (Table 1).

Equally informative are the graves which contained knob-ended scabbards (Table 2). Most of these characteristic scabbards are Germanic imitations of Roman types (Kaczanowski 1994, p.211ff., Abb. 2). Noticeable is their concentration in the lower Elbe area (Fig. 4), where they were used from the middle of the first century to the middle of the 2nd century. Like in the graves with bronze cauldrons, the spurs often found here are typical for equestrian warriors.

No less important are the preserved components of the shields in the graves of Hagenow. The almost completely preserved metal fittings in grave 9/1995 make it clear that the shield also indicates the rank of the warrior. On the basis of the bronze edge-mounts (bindings), together with the also bronze shield grip and the iron shield boss with a short spike (*Dornschildbuckel*, Jahn type 6), it was possible to reconstruct a shield, which was 115 centimetres of high and 67 centimetres wide. It was apparently built out of three wooden boards.

In the inhumation grave F 19 of Hunn i Borge near the Oslofjord, a similar shield *in situ* could be documented (Resi 1986, p.71, Taf. 8; 57). Again, it is an equestrian warrior, who carried silver-inlayed spurs (*Stuhlsporen*). However, like the shield bosses with long spikes (*Stangenschildbuckel*, Jahn type 7), the *Dornschildbuckel* found in grave 9/1995 is a very long-lived form, worn from the Pre-Roman Iron Age until the end of the Early Roman Iron Age during the Marcomannic Wars (Zieling 1989, p.40ff.; and 84ff.). Noticeable is the combination of such shield-bosses with decorated bronze edge-mounts in the western part of the distribution area, oriented to the River Elbe. On the other hand, the extraordinarily decorated and silver filigree trimmed shield grip belongs to a relatively small group, apparently developed in Scandinavia during the late first and second century AD. A shield grip

from a grave in Brostorp on Öland is very much alike in design and decoration (Rasch 1991, p.109, Fig. 54).

A speciality of the shield are the four silver decoration discs, 4.3 centimetres in diameter, which were probably put in front of the bevelled shield corners (Lüth *et al.* 2000, p.166, Abb. 14, 3). Similar ornament discs are known from some graves of the Augustan-Tiberian Period in central Germany, the lower Elbe area and central Jutland (Schultze 2002; Völling 2005, p.171ff.; 293, Karte 23).

It was not until the end of the second and the beginning of the third century, that round decoration discs in the shape of face-masks or *tutuli*, made out of gilded silver sheet foil, appear again on the splendid shields of the war booty from Illerup A in northern Jutland (v. Carnap-Bornheim, Ilkjær 1996, p.433ff., Abb. 257-260). Therefore, the shield of Hagenow is a chronological link between the adornment of the shields during the Late La Tène-Period/Early Roman Iron Age and the Late Roman Iron Age.

### Common elements of burial customs

The importance of the burial custom of adding weapons and Roman vessels to the grave can be shown in an exemplary way by the grave of a four or five-year-old boy at the cemetery of Hagenow. Beside his ashes, buried in an organic and not in a bronze vessel, the remains of a glass vessel, the complete handle of a Roman miniature sword from the second century (Béal and Feugère 1987) as well as three iron arrowheads were found in the grave. So this is rare evidence for the addition of arrowheads in graves of the early Imperial period. Right now there are no equivalents for both the miniature sword and the shape of the arrowheads, neither in the Elbe area nor in the area of Przeworsk Culture.

An example of a grave of the Roman Empire containing a miniature sword is the grave of a six to ten-year-old boy from the cemetery of Roßberg near Darmstadt in the Roman province *Germania Superior* from around 125 AD (Schmidt 1996, p.91f.; 278, Taf. 15, 11).

Other than what this single find implies, there are many more examples of the similarity in the beliefs about the afterlife and burial customs of the Germanic warrior elite of the Early Roman Iron Age. An especially impressive grave, comparable to grave 9/1995 in Hagenow, is cremation grave 37 of Kostolná, close to the Danube Dunaji in the southwest of Slovakia in the area of the former *regnum Vannianum* (Kolník 1980, p. 111f., Taf. 52-53). Although the copy of an iron-edged bronze cauldron made out of clay is used



as an urn here, the armament and equipment is similar in many ways to the sword, shield, shield-boss, lance, belt buckle, strike-a-light and spurs (Voß 2005, p.35, Abb. 9). This grave can also be dated back to the end of the first and the beginning of the second century.

Definite evidence for the connections between the population of the lower Elbe and the middle Danube area during the second half of the first and the first half of the second century is the distribution of the characteristic belt buckle with rolled up ends of the frame (Rahmen) Madyda-Legutko (1986, p.12ff., Taf. 4: 1-3) group B type 1. The same applies to a group of silver-inlaid spike-like fire steels, so-called Scandinavian fire steels, and belt buckles with H-shaped twin spike, that give an example of the influence of Przeworsk Culture on the equipment of the warriors discussed here.

On the other hand, the influences from the north are shown in the silver-inlaid spurs and accompanying shoe fittings. Finds of the latter in Scandinavian inhumation graves have permitted the reconstruction of some complex adorned shoes with such spurs (Voß 2005, p.39, Abb. 12; 13; Tab. 2). The twice and four times riveted decoration discs, as well as the six times riveted spurs, emerged apparently from the western Baltic area. It is noticeable that silver-inlaid spurs and decoration discs were also found in the area of Przeworsk Culture and in Moravia: for example, among the well-known “king grave” of Mušov, which dates back to the beginning of the Marcomannic Wars in 166/168 AD (v. Carnap-Bornheim 2002, p.213ff., 544ff. with figures).

## Conclusions

An analysis of the weapons and elements of the equipment in the graves of Hagenow leads us to the following conclusions:

The burial site, which was occupied for five to six generations, shows the local development of the tradition of some elites. This tradition manifests the rank as well as the status of children and adults through the burial custom. For this, Roman goods, like the complete armament, with sword, spear, lance and shield, as well as equipment, helmet, chain mail, spurs and belt, are used.

During the first half, the middle (?), of the first century contacts with the west (*Treveri*) existed, then from the second half of the first century onwards to Scandinavia, to Przeworsk Culture (Oder-Warthe-region, Silesia) and to the Vannius Empire or the Marcomannic-Quadic centre of power at the middle Danube.

The participation in Germanic retinues and probably also in Roman services allowed access to Roman goods of great value: parts of armament and equipment, as well as metal and glass vessels, and other precious metals.

The contact with Roman culture and with Germanic elites of different cultural imprint resulted in innovative, exclusive status symbols: splendour belts with figurative images, belts imitating Roman cinguli, silver-inlaid belt fittings, shields with complex fittings, splendid shoes with spurs. The selection of material and the manufacturing technology uncovers differences of rank.

Since the end of the first century it is recognizable that parts of the armament and equipment (belt, strike-a-light equipment, spurs and spur shoes) of the Germanic warrior elite from southern Scandinavia to the central Elbe area became unitary and seemed almost “standardised”.

Based on kinship alliances existing in the western part of Przeworsk Culture, the community of Hagenow belonged to the *superiores barbarii*, who were responsible for the Marcomannic Wars.

At the end of the Marcomannic Wars the use of the cemetery ended too.

Close contacts with Scandinavia are proven by the shield from grave 9/1995, shoe and silver-inlaid spurs, as well as the deposition of golden fingerings Beckmann (1969) group I into the graves.

Numerous elements of the armament and equipment in the graves of Hagenow are found in the early war booty of the second half of the second and early third century from Thorsberg and Vimose (sword belt, shield ornament discs, hook of a mail-shirt, knob-spurs with bronze coated spike; further belt-sets, strike-a-lights, bucket-shaped amulets, dice and game board, combs).

“Times of war or times of well-being?” was B. Kontny’s (2005) question in the analysis of weapon graves from Przeworsk Culture. From my point of view, the Hagenow cemetery may indicate the well-being of one or more noble families, but also the increase of self-awareness towards the Roman Empire.

Translated by H. U. Voß.

English Revised by Angelika Abegg-Wigg

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Received: 27 January 2007, Revised: 9 May 2007

## NUO BALTIJOS JŪROS IKI DUNOJAUS – ANKSTYVOJO ROMĖNIŠKOJO LAIKOTARPIO KARIŲ KAPAI IŠ HAGENOVO (MEKLENBURGO ŽEMĖ) IR JŲ RYŠIAI SU BARBARŲ BEI ROMĖNIŠKŲ PASAULIAIS

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### Santrauka

Ankstyvojo romėniškojo laikotarpio Hagenovo (Ludwigslust apskritis, vakarinė Meklenburgo žemės dalis) kapinynas iš kitų to laikotarpio šio regiono laidojimo paminklų išsiskiria nepaprastai didele romėniškų metalinių ir stiklinių indų bei ginkluotės (trys šarviniai dirbiniai, vienas raiteliui priklausęs šalmas) gausa (1–2 pav.; 1 lent.). Dešimtyje iš 18 nesuardytų kapų mirusieji buvo palaidoti su ginklais ir ginkluote. Ankstyviausi Hagenovo kapinyno kapai priklauso imperatoriaus Klaudijaus (41–54 m.) valdymo laikams. Hagenovo kapinyno degintinių laidosenoje (degintiniai kaulai kartu su įkapėmis buvo sudėti į bronzinį katilą) ir įkapėse galima išvelgti germanų kariui raiteliui, apie 100 metus, būdingą ginkluotę ir ekipuotę. Tarp tokių degintinių kapų išskiria kapas 9/1995. Kai kurios išlikusios ginkluotės dalys yra panašios į vidutinio lygio samdinio (*Auxiliar*) ginklus iš Merhrum regiono Reino žemupyje (3 pav.). Šiame kapinyne rastas romėniškas „Weiler“ tipo šalmas ir šarviniai dirbiniai žinomi iš vakarinių keltų kapų, germanų *Suebi Nicreti* kapų bei pietvakarinės Vokietijos (4 pav.). Taigi teritorija, kurioje buvo paplitę vienašmeniai kalavijai ir bronziniai katilai, naudoti kaip urnos, turėjo bendrą bruožą (1 lent.). Kita vertus, kapo 9/1995 iš Hagenovo kapinyno ginkluotė ir ekipuotė leidžia šio laidojimo paminklo radinius palyginti su panašiais dirbiniais, rastais vakarinėje Skandinavijoje, Elbės žemupyje, Pševorsko kultūros paminkluose ir Dunojaus vidurupio markomanų-kvadų centre (5 pav.). Minimų regionų bendrumą rodo ir metalinės antskydžių detalės, diržai su apkalais, pentinai ir ornamentuoti batų dirželiai. Kartu šio regiono kapai su ginklais, ekipuotės detalės nuo I a. pabaigos iki pat markomanų karų (166–180 m.) rodo laidosenos ir tikėjimo pomirtiniu gyvenimu bendrumą. Hagenovo kapų analizė atskleidžia, kad penkios ar šešios elito kartos savo aukštą padėtį ir socialinį statusą demonstravo laidojimo papročiais, iš kurių ginklai ir ginkluotės elementai turėjo svarbią reikšmę. Bendras įkapių turtingumas ir kokybė yra akivaizdžiai susiję su germanų kariais, tarnavusiais romėnams. Taip pat yra akivaizdžių įrodymų apie šio regiono glaudžius kontak-

tus su vakarine Pševorsko kultūros dalimi ir Dunojaus vidurupiu. Visa tai rodo, kad Hagenovo bendruomenė priklausė tiems išskirtiniams barbarams (*superiores barbarii*), kurie buvo atsakingi dėl markomanų karų.