

IS THERE RELIABLE ARCHIVAL DATA? THE PROBLEM OF INTERPRETATION OF AN UNUSUAL SPECIMEN FROM GURJEVSK (FORMERLY TRAUSSITTEN) ON THE SAMBIAN PENINSULA

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Abstract

The article concerns the fork-like artefact found in grave 22 at Gurjevsk (formerly Trausitten). Based on Herbert Jankuhn's files, it had seemed to be a part of a Roman helmet, but after finding it in the *Prussia Collection* (nowadays in Berlin) it seems to be of quite modern origin (a musket rest?).

Key words: helmet, crest-holder, weapon, Dollkeim-Kovrovo Culture, musket.

Introduction

It sounds like a common phrase that archival data became the main source of information concerning the archaeology of the West Baltic Circle (Kolendo, Nowakowski 2000). It still provides us with new, sometimes astounding, finds. One such unusual finding from the necropolis in Gurjevsk, Gurjevsk district (formerly Trausitten, Kreis Fischhausen) I have noticed searching through Herbert Jankuhn's files¹ (as refers to the necropolis in Trausitten see: Hollack 1908, p. 167; Nowakowski 1996, pp. 153, 157, 160, 161 and 163 with further literature). It seemed to be of great importance for our state of knowledge concerning the Sambian Peninsula during the Roman Period. The artefact in question comes from grave 22. The following data may be drawn from a chart from Herbert Jankuhn's files (Fig. 1).

Furnishing and chronology of Gurjevsk grave 22

1. In cremation urn grave 22 there were found: an urn, another clay vessel, a fragment of an iron bit together with a ring-shaped curb bit and metal fittings to fasten bridles, two iron spurs, as well as a fork-like iron object.

2. These iron elements were sketched by Herbert Jankuhn, and their basic dimensions were put down.

3. Jankuhn also wrote a remark that he used drawings prepared by Johann Heydeck, a former keeper of the Prussia Altertumsgesellschaft society's collection (written note: "Zeichnung von Heydeck"). Nevertheless, it is most probable that Jankuhn knew the grave furnishing from an autopsy, as they were gathered in the Prussia Museum collection in Königsberg (on the chart he wrote an inventory No. PM III 158, 1014: 22).

4. The mysterious specimen had the shape of a letter "Y", its length was 9.4 centimetres and the width of the upper part 8.4 centimetres. Over the middle part of it, an oval outline was drawn by Jankuhn, but its character cannot be interpreted definitely as he did not make any closer description of it. The arms of the upper part had outcurved terminals. Traces of rust are clearly visible in the sketch of the lower part of the specimen, and it seems that this area had been completely spoiled by corrosion.

The chronology of the specimen can not be set precisely. As refers to the iron bit, it should be attributed probably to type 1C_{1a}, and the ring to type 2B, after M. Ørsnes (1993), but obviously these elements are not good chronological indicators (Ørsnes 1993, Fig. 53: a-b). Moreover, we do not know anything concerning the shape of the clay vessels as they were not described or drawn by Jankuhn. The only dating element is the spur (or spurs)². Although its drawing is not very precise, the relatively flat and narrow bow of even width as

¹ Kept in *Archäologisches Landesmuseum Schloß Gottorf in Schleswig* (I would like to express here my gratitude to Professor Claus von Carnap-Bornheim).

² If spurs appear in pairs they are generally of identical or similar shape. Unfortunately, Jankuhn left us with a drawing of one spur (Fig. 1).

Function and interpretation of the mysterious specimen

The problem arises: what was the function of that mysterious element? My first impression was that we may have the crest holder of a Roman helmet (Fig. 2). The helmet-crest was an important element of Roman military attire, signifying status, enabling to distinguish a unit during an engagement in the field, as well as playing a psychological role (Bishop 1990, pp.161-162). The general shape of the item in question strengthens the above hypothesis. Forked crest holders had proportionally longer or shorter arms (Bishop and Coulston 1993, Fig. 58: 1, 4). Apparently, their length was not the crucial factor. Also, the terminals differed from one another: they were shaped as simple bars, eg Vindonissa (Waurick 1988, Fig. 4: 1-2), knobs, eg Aislingen (Bishop and Coulston 1993, Fig. 58: 1), and quite frequently they were outcurved, as

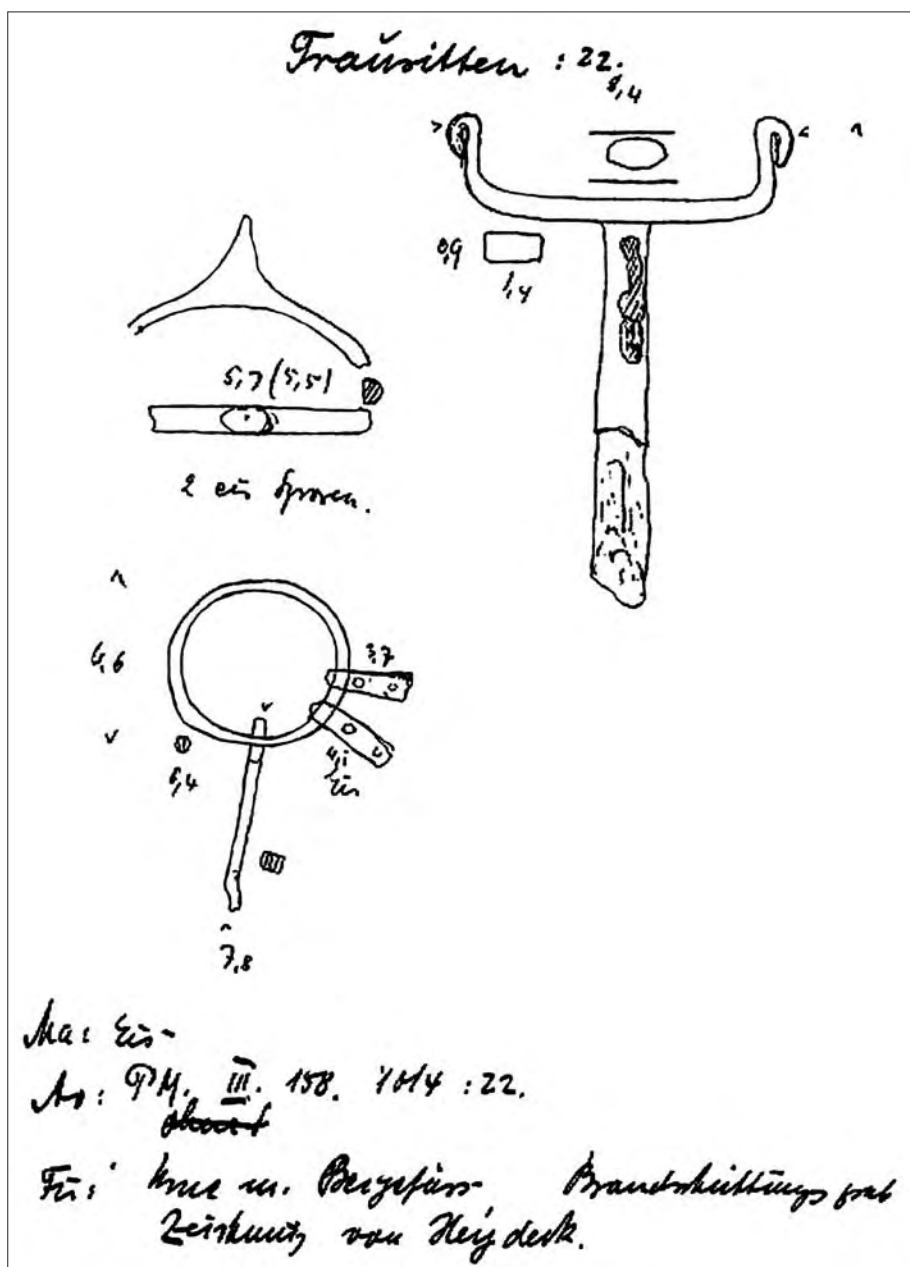


Fig. 1. The furnishings of the grave 22 from Gurjevsk (formerly Trausitten) according to Herbert Jankuhn's files.

well as the conical prick are clearly visible. Therefore, we may attribute it as an example close to subgroup C2 (more probable) or D after J. Ginalski (1991, pp.58-59). On this premise it may be cautiously stated that the grave comes from phase B₂, which means the first phase of Dollkeim-Kovrovo Culture (Nowakowski 1996, pp.48-50), maybe even the earliest stage of it, as spurs C2 after J. Ginalski appeared during phase B₁ in Przeworsk Culture (Ginalski 1991, p.59); examples of subgroup D are dated to phase B₂ (Ginalski 1991, p.59). It should be noted that spurs and horse harnesses appeared in Dollkeim-Kovrovo Culture in its whole chronological range (Nowakowski 1996, pp.56-58).

in the case of Gurjevsk grave 22, see Kalkriese (mentioned above) or Rheingönheim (Bishop and Coulston 1993, Fig. 58: 4). Such crest holders were made of bronze as well as iron, eg Kalkriese (Franzius 1993, Fig. 1). The cross-section of arms and the lower part was rectangular (see example from Aislingen, mentioned above). Such holders were characteristic of Gallic-Roman helmets (Weisenau type). They appeared during the times of the early principate, mostly from the first half of the first century AD up to the start of the third century AD, although we know earlier specimens of that type from the times of Augustus' reign (Waurick 1988, p.255), eg Kalkriese (Franzius 1993, p.112;



Fig. 2. A helmet with a crest holder from Vindonissa (after Waurick 1988, Fig. 4: 1-2).

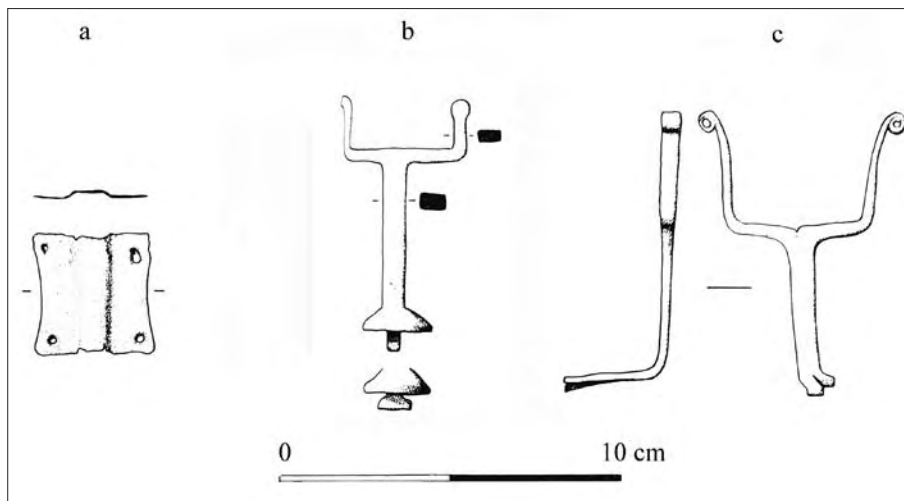


Fig. 3. Early Principate helmet fittings: a slide-on crest holder attachment from Rheingönheim; b twist-on crest holder from Aislingen; c slide-on crest holder from Rheingönheim (after Bishop and Coulston 1993, Fig. 58: 1, 3-4).

see also Waurick 1988, Fig. 14). There were two basic kinds of them: slide-on crest holders as well as twist-on ones (Fig. 3). The former was mounted on the helmet with the use of a metal attachment (generally made of bronze), riveted to the bowl. The knee-shaped lower part of the crest-holder was slid into the tube of the attachment. The latter was furnished with a tongue that was twisted into the bowl through the hole (Bishop and Coulston 1993, p.93; see also Robinson 1975, Figs. 62-74; Waurick 1988, p.334). Although we know plenty of crest holders, it is still unclear how the construction of the crest box looked (Bishop and Coulston 1993, p.93). Nevertheless, generally the crest block was

made of wood, with protruding organic elements like hair or feathers. We may mention here the re-enacting efforts of Legio XX Valeria Victrix. The Twentieth Legion was founded in 1991 to recreate the soldiers of the Roman army for public demonstrations and living history displays. Their weapons, including helmets, are carefully researched and reconstructed. According to their experience, a forked holder was supposed to keep the box (Fig. 4), while its ends were furnished with loops that served simply to link the box ends with the use of hooks, riveted to a bowl or fastened with the use of leather straps (Anon 2006; see also Bishop 1990, Fig. 1: 3).

Generally, elements of Roman helmets are unique in European *barbaricum* in the Roman Period (Kaczanowski 1992, pp.53-56 and 92). Instead of single examples from the western part of the European *barbaricum* (Olfen, Kreis Coesfeld, Giessener Stadtwald,

Kreis Giessen), there are a few examples from a bog site at Thorsberg on Jutland Peninsula, among others a mask helmet supplemented with barbarian motifs in the shape of bird heads (Engelhardt 1863, Pl. 5; Raddatz 1987, Pl. 85-91), (Engelhardt 1869, pl. 4: 1; Pauli Jensen 2003, p.237, Fig. 12) and the site of the battle in Teutoburgian Forest – Kalkriese (a famous mask from an ornamental helmet and small pieces from other helmets: Franzius 1991, pp.53-59, pl. 1-2; Wilhelmi 1992; Franzius 1993, pp.111-112 and 131-135, Fig. 24). They are extremely rare in graves: we may enumerate here only a cheek-piece from Hagenow, grave II (the Elbian Circle) from phase B₂ (Voß 1998, p.59, pl. 45,



Fig. 4. Different methods for fastening a crest: a–b use of a crest-holder; c use of a knob (after Anon, 2006).

57: 1-6) and probably the Celtic helmet from Malaja Kopanja (Przeworsk Culture) dated to phase B₁ (Kaczanowski 1992, p.53; Kobal 1997, p.41, Figs. 10-11). Nevertheless, the overwhelming majority of Roman helmets come from a Roman military context, which means military camps, Hadrian's Wall, etc (eg type Weisenau: see Waurick 1988, p.337). Therefore, it is a tempting idea to interpret the item from Gurjevsk as a crest holder, and as a result I presented such a proposition at the conference "Weapons, Weaponry and Man. In Memoriam of Vytautas Kazakevičius".

Investigations conducted by me in the collection of the former Prussia Museum in Königsberg, kept nowadays in the *Museum für Vor- und Frühgeschichte* in Berlin (*Prussia Collection*), changed the situation definitely³.

³ I would like to thank Christine Reich PhD and Horst Wieder PhD from the *Museum für Vor- und Frühgeschichte* in Berlin for help and access to the collection and archives.

part of the socket resulted in its destruction (the patch that Jankuhn drew is actually an irregular hole). The lower part is in a better state of preservation than was suggested by Jankuhn's drawing. The most important conclusion is that the item from Gurjevsk can not be treated as a crest holder, because of the socket construction, unknown so far for Roman helmets. Of course, it cannot be denied that we are dealing with a local solution, but such a presumption is less plausible, because, as far as we know, Barbarians generally did not use helmets, neither Roman nor local, during the Roman Period. We should notice here that the object from Gurjevsk is slightly bigger than the majority of forked crest holders, although the difference is rather small (it might be assumed that the owner of a helmet used a wider, roughly seven-centimetre-wide, crest box).

It is easier to reject the explanation presented above than to propose a new one. There are no direct analo-

It occurred that equipment of grave 22 from former Trausitten survived, which gave me the possibility to compare it with archival data. Besides the confirmation of the general shape and dimensions of specimens drawn by Jankuhn, one should underline the appearance of the second iron spur of the same type as the first one (both strongly corroded, lacking one of its arms), but also the striking difference in the construction of the forked artefact. Actually, its lower part consists of a socket not a rod (Fig. 5), as one should assume taking into consideration Jankuhn's sketch. The oval outline drawn by Jankuhn aimed probably to show this fact in an obvious way to him but not clear to us. The socket is 1.8 centimetres in diameter, and there are no fastening nails or rivets visible on it.

The corrosion process noticeable in the upper

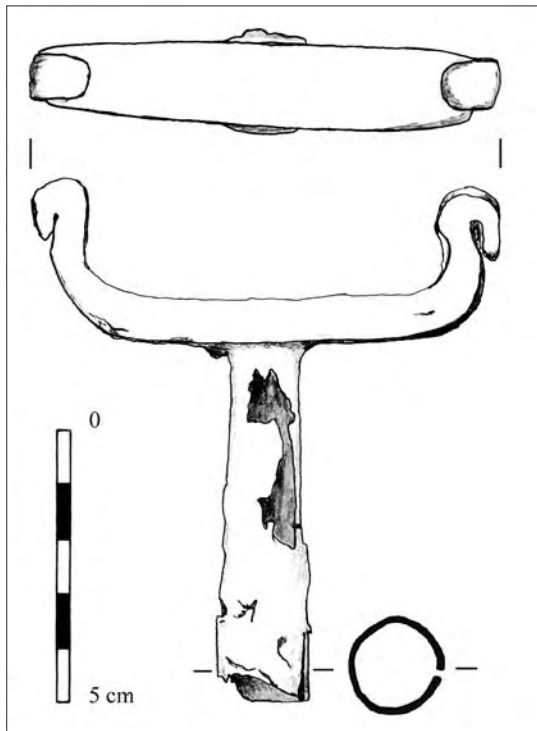


Fig. 5. Drawing of the fork-like artefact from Gurjevsk (by B. Kontny).

gies in archaeological material known by me. The closest ones come from the Oksywie and Wielbark Culture cemetery at Grudziądz-Rządź, Grudziądz district (formerly Rondszen, Kreis Graudenz). The first was found in the pit grave 6 on 23 April 1888 (Anger 1890, p.22, pl. 19: 26) together with an iron fibula type N after J. Kostrzewski (1919). Its dimensions (length 15cm, width 8.3cm) and general shape resemble the item from Gurjevsk, but the terminals of the bow were furnished with circular plates to which a horizontal iron rod was riveted. Therefore, its function seems to be different from that of our puzzling artefact. Moreover, we cannot be sure whether it really came from the same grave as the Late La Tène construction brooch: it might had been Anger's mistake, which is supported by the fact that he published a few surely contemporary items together with archaeological material, eg modern scissor and a spoon, as well as an ancient lance head from "Brandgrube 638" (Anger 1890, p.42, pl. 20: 1-4). We can also question the old dating of the second analogy, from pit grave 454 (Anger 1890, p.439, pl. 19: 23). The iron object was not only smaller (length 9.5cm) but also its terminals were shaped in a different way: they are much bigger and curved spirally outwards. It looks as if it was formed in order to hang something on it. What is more, the only element ascribed to the equipment of the grave is an iron fitting (Anger 1890, pl. 19: 24) that does not seem to date from the Roman Period.

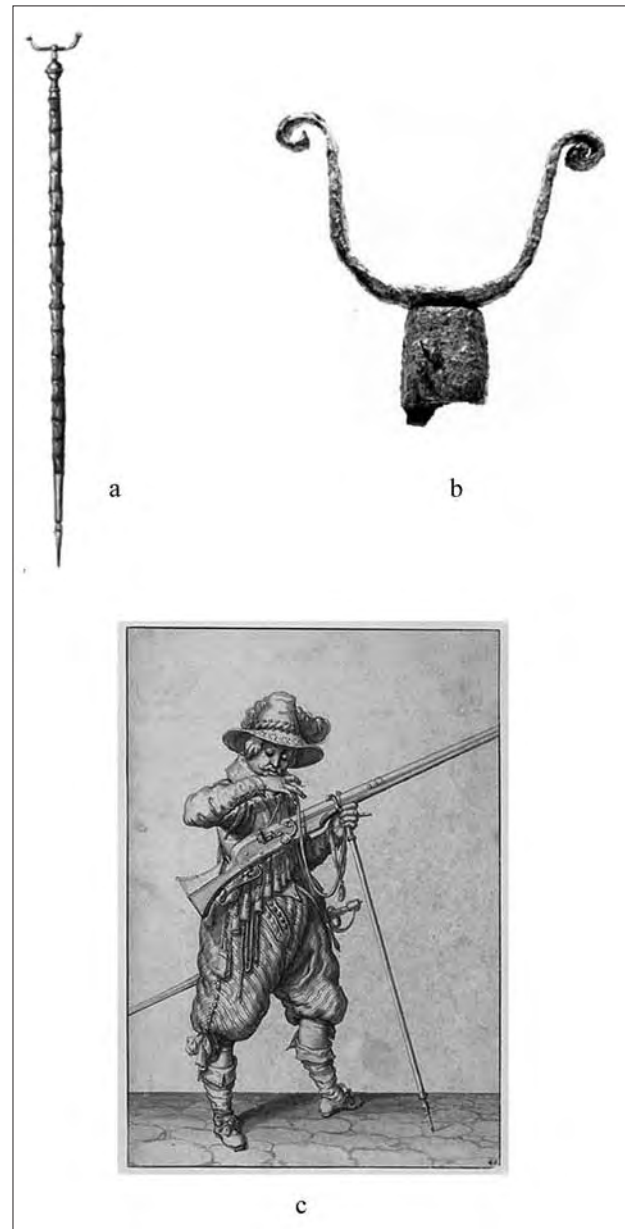


Fig. 6. Musket rest: a reconstruction of a musket rest (after <http://uzbrojenie.webpark.pl/muskiet.html>); b a fork-like element from a musket rest found in Jamestown, a former Virginia English colony (after <http://www.apva.org/exhibit/rest.html>); c picture showing a soldier on guard blowing out a match (Jacques de Gheyn II, Flemish, about 1597) in the collection of the J. Paul Getty Museum in Los Angeles (after <http://www.getty.edu/art/gettyguide/artObjectDetails?art.obj=398>).

Conclusions

In concluding, we have to say that, as refers to the item from Gurjevsk, there is a great possibility that we are dealing with a similar situation as the one described above. It is hard to exclude the possibility that an excavator did not make accurate observations and that the artefact in question was attributed to grave furnishing simply by chance. Although there are no grounds for rejecting its prehistoric origin ultimately, it seems more probable that it is modern. Regarding its func-

tion, one of the possibilities is that it was the upper element of the support of a musket (we should not neglect the possibility that this is the case with the item from "Grave 454" at Grudziądz-Rządź). Heavy muskets had to balance on a rest (the Italian term for a musket rest is *forchetta*). Musket rests were popular from the middle of the 16th century till the end of the 17th century. The upper part was made of brass or iron, shaped in the form of a fork, sometimes widening slightly, frequently with outcurved terminals (eg Roberts 2002, pp.4 and 68; Kwaśniewicz 2004, pp.81-82) (Fig. 6). It could also be used for other purposes, but so far they are not clear to us.

Nevertheless, there is one firm statement to be made: we should be very cautious in interpreting archival data, even that treated as reliable, especially when we are dealing with untypical artefacts ...

Translated by the author

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AR ARCHYVINIAI DUOMENYS YRA PATIKIMI? NEĮPRASTO DIRBINIO IŠ GURJEVSKO (BUV. TRAUSITTEN), SAMBIJOS PUSIASALYJE, INTERPRETACIJOS PROBLEMA

Bartosz Kontny

Santrauka

Šis straipsnis skirtas neįprastos dvišakio formos dirbinio, rasto Gurjevsko (buv. Trausitten), degintiniame kape 22, analizei. Informacija apie šį dirbinį buvo rasta Herberto Jankuhno archyve, kur jo (H. J.) piešiniuose buvo pažymėta dirbinių matmenys ir formos (1 pav.). Gurjevsko kape 22 buvo rasta: urna, dar vienas molinis indas, geležinių žąslų fragmentas su metaliniais kampanų apkalais, du geležiniai pentinai ir minėtas geležinis dvišakio formos dirbinys. Šis paslaptingas dvišakio ar Y raidės formos dirbinys yra 9,4 cm ilgio, su 8,4 cm pločio į išorę atlenktais galais (1; 5 pav.). Šio dirbinio chronologija nėra tiksliai nustatyta, nes kape 22, be geležinių pentinų (ar pentino, priklausiančio C2 grupės pogrūpiui arba, labiau tikėtina, D grupei, pagal J. Ginalskio klasifikaciją; jų piešinys nelabai tikslus), nėra daugiau preciziškai nustatytos chronologijos dirbinių. Atsargi prielaida gali būti tokia, kad Gurjevsko kapas

IV

WARRIORS
AND
ARMAMENTS
FROM THE
VISTULA
TO THE
DAUGUVA

22 priklauso B2 periodui, tai reiškia – pirmajai Dollkeimo-Kovrovo kultūros fazei.

Pradžioje autorius manė, kad šis paslaptingas radinys yra romėniško šalmo viršūnės laikiklis (2–4 pav.). Romėniško šalmo viršūnė buvo svarbus romėnų armijos ekipuotės elementas, leidžiantis mūšyje atskirti vieną karinį junginį nuo kito, taip pat šalmo viršūnė, reikšdama kariūno statusą, galėjo vaidinti ir psichologinį vaidmenį.

Tyrinėdamas „Prussia“ muziejaus rinkinį, dabar saugomą Berlyne, Proistorės muziejuje, autorius aptiko Gurjevsko kapo 22 radinius, todėl originalą buvo galima palyginti su archyviniais H. Jankuhno piešiniais. H. Jankuhno nupieštas dvišakis dirbinys forma ir matmenimis yra panašus į Berlyne rastą originalą. Tačiau originalas turi ir ryškių konstrukcijos skirtumų (5 pav.). Iš tikrųjų dirbinio apatinė dalis susideda iš įmovos, o nėra vientisas strypas, kaip atrodė H. Jankuhno piešinyje (1; 5 pav.). Todėl svarbiausia išvada yra ta, kad aptariamasis Gurjevsko kapo 22 dirbinys negali būti laikomas šalmo viršūnės laikikliu, nes tokia įmovos konstrukcija romėnų šalmuose nežinoma.

Tokiam dirbiniui nėra tiesioginių analogijų ir archeologinėje medžiagoje. Artimiausia analogija šiam dirbiniui žinoma iš Oksyvo ir Vielbarko kultūroms priklausančio Grudziądz–Rządź, Grudziądz apskritis (buv. Ronsden, Graudenz apskritis) kapinyno, bet faktiškai dirbiniai gana reikšmingai skiriasi savo formomis.

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