

# THE SECOND HOARD OF SKOMĘTNO

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## Abstract

A silver hoard found in what is currently called Skomętno, and bought by the Museum of Prehistory in Berlin, is the basis for a discussion about Medieval hoards in the Baltic region concerning typology and chronology. The hoard, which can be dated to the second half of the 11th century, also shows interesting similarities with a hoard which was found in Skomenten in 1927. It was brought to the Prussia Museum in Königsberg, and has been lost since the end of the Second World War.

Key words: East Prussia, Viking Age, hoard, ingots, Skomętno.

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## Introduction

Viking Age silver hoards distributed around the Baltic Sea have always been of great interest to archaeologists dealing with this period. The different composition, with coins, jewellery and ingots, seems to be a sign of chronological and cultural differences, which can also be proven by a find which was bought by the Museum of Prehistory in Berlin in 2009.

### The purchase of the hoard by the Museum of Prehistory in Berlin

In 2009, the Museum of Pre- and Early History in Berlin was able to buy a silver hoard from a private seller, which was found in Skomenten, in the former county of Lyck, nowadays Skomętno,<sup>1</sup> in the Warmian Masurian voivodeship in Poland. The sellers, refugees from East Prussia, discovered the hoard on their farm while working. The loop of a bracelet had got caught in the prongs of a fork. A first examination of the place by the owners was unsuccessful.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The article contains the archaeological results of a larger examination concerning the second hoard of Skomętno, made by the Conservation Department of the Museum für Vor- und Frühgeschichte, by Hermann Born, a material analysis made by Deutsches GeoForschungs Zentrum Potsdam by Rolf L. Romer and Dieter Rhede, and LIDAR scanning of the surroundings of Skomętno made by Cezary Sobczak from the State Archaeological Museum in Warsaw. It was a great honour to present the typological and chronological results at the Klaipėda conference 'The Sea and the Coastlands' which was dedicated to the 70th birthday of Professor Dr habil. Vladas Žulkus.

<sup>2</sup> The exact position of the hoard is not mentioned, in order to prevent illegal digging. The place and the information about the discovery of the find were told to the author by the sellers.

Doing a targeted search in the same spot, the father of the sellers found a vessel with further objects while purposely ploughing deeply in the same spot. The broken fragments of the vessel were not picked up as usual. According to the description by the sellers, the find place was northeast of the village of Kleinskomentnen, at the top of a small hill of a diameter of 50 metres. The hoard that was bought by the museum is composed of two solid bracelets, one spiral ring, and 14 ingot fragments. The total weight amounts to 1,890 grams (Fig. 1). A few years later, a neighbour discovered 25 ingots in the same place. The whereabouts of those ingots is not known.

The existence of the hoard was well known among East Prussians living in West Germany after the Second World War. The owners presented their find at several meetings of *Landsmannschaft Ostpreußen*. The first contacts with the Stiftung Preußischer Kulturbesitz by the *Kreisvertreter* of the *Landsmannschaft Ostpreußen* were in the Sixties (Bogucki 2009, 497, Fig. 3).

In 2008, the Museum of Pre- and Early History was again informed of the intention of the owners to sell the objects. Gerd Bandilla, the *Kreisvertreter*, was able to convince the owners to sell the hoard to a German museum, especially one in Berlin or Nuremberg. In the end, Berlin was able to pay the price the owners wanted.

In October 1927, at a distance of 750 metres from the hoard that the Berlin Museum bought, a farmer named Jezierski discovered, also while working, the grave of a 'Sudovian princess'. The find was brought to the Prussia-Museum in Königsberg. It has been lost since the end of the Second World War (Engel 1930, 7). A copy of the find, which was presented at the local museum in Lyck, disappeared when the Red Army invaded the town in January 1945 (Gerdau 1993, 10).



Fig. 1. The second hoard of Skomętno, Warmian Masurian voivodeship. Museum für Vor- und Frühgeschichte, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin (photograph by C. Klein).

The find, deposited in a copper vessel, was made up of a necklace of 16 cross pendants with hollow beads, two penannular brooches with animal heads, and two spiral rings (Fig. 2). The vessel was covered by a flat stone.

### Grave or hoard?

For an interpretation of both finds, the topographical situation has to be considered. Up to now, the find from

1927 is mostly regarded as a grave. Wilhelm Gaerte, the director of the Prussia Museum in Königsberg, mentioned it as a grave in his monograph *Urgeschichte Ostpreussens* (Gaerte 1929, Fig. 288). Carl Engel, a scientific assistant at the Prussia Museum, also described the find in 1931 as a grave. ‘... *kreidig weiße Bruchstücke*’ between the objects mentioned by the farmer Jezielski could have been the reason for this interpretation (Engel 1931, 75). Engel, visiting the site on 19 October 1929, picked up burnt fragments of bones, badly burnt sherds, and ‘*klingend hart gebrannte Drehscheibenware*’. All of these were brought to the laboratories in Königsberg for examination. In 1939, Engel described the find as a hoard. It could be that the examinations, and a small excavation at the site without further graves, had been the reason for Engel’s change of opinion (Engel 1939, 55). The topographical situation is also an argument against the interpretation as a grave. Engel wrote that, in the past, the site was a spit surrounded by swampy ground. Such a place is unsuitable for a cemetery. Swampy ground, such as the remains of a former lake or the littoral of a lake, may also be good proof for an interpretation of these white fragments as limestone.

The interpretation of the second find from Skomętno seems to be easier. Ingots are not grave goods. This

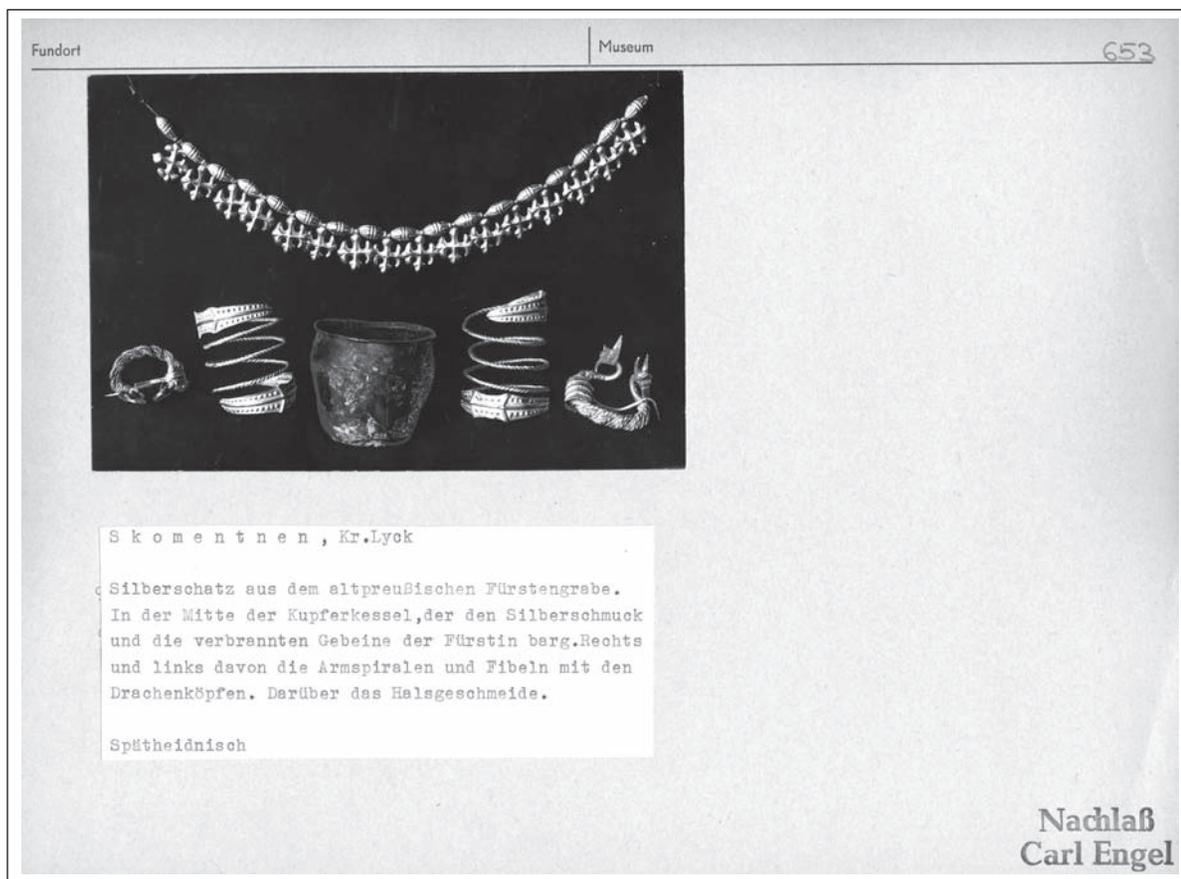


Fig. 2. The filing card of the first hoard from Skomętno, from the estate of Carl Engel. Carl-Engel-Nachlass, Seminar für Ur- und Frühgeschichte der Georg-August-Universität Göttingen.

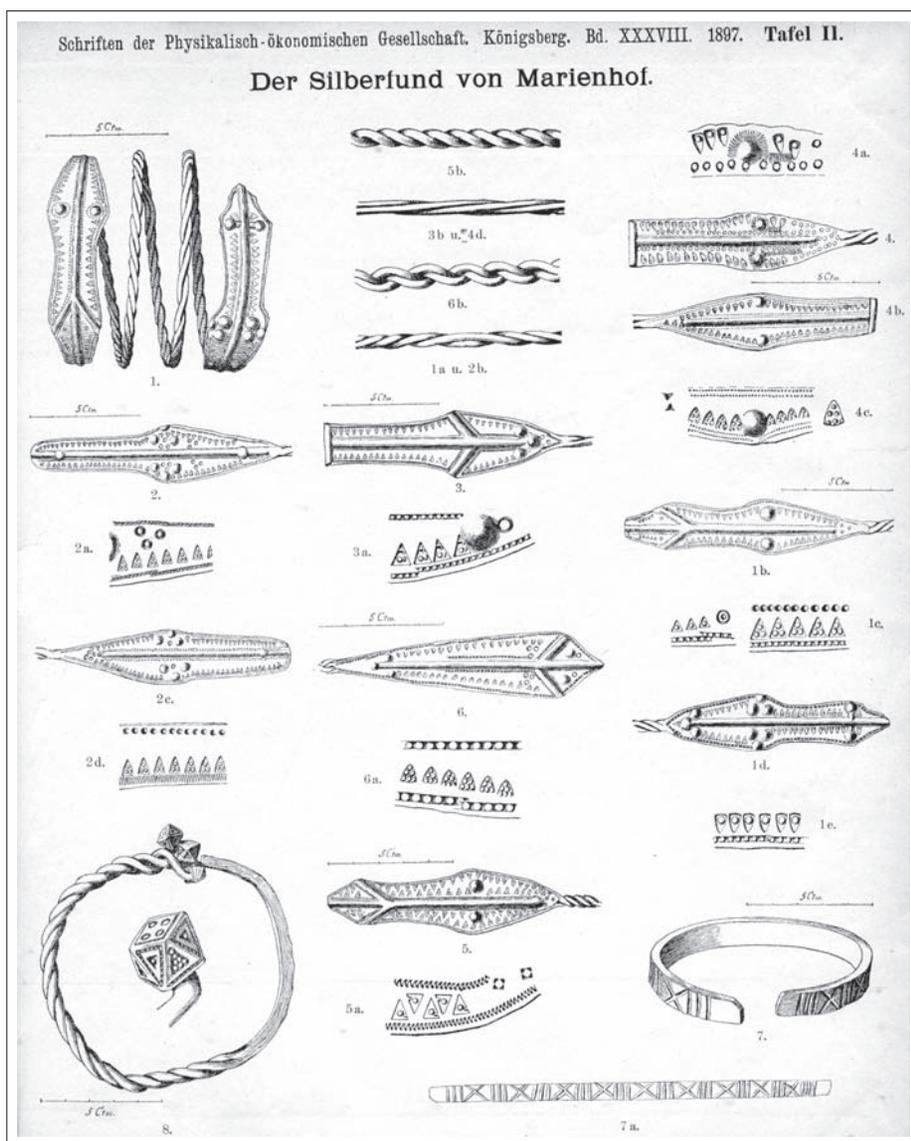


Fig. 3. The Marienhof hoard (now Brodzikowo, Warmian Masurian voivodeship (after Schriften der Physikalisch-ökonomischen Gesellschaft Königsberg 38, 1897, pl. 2).

fact and the exposed situation of the site, at the top of a hill of a diameter of 50 metres, are good arguments for an interpretation of the find as a hoard.

### The jewellery of both Skomętno finds

The spiral rings of the hoard from 1927 are very similar to the spiral ring of the ensemble bought by the Berlin Museum. Such spiral rings had also been found in the hoard of Marienhof, in the former county of Sensburg (now Brodzikowo, Warmian Masurian voivodeship), which was discovered in 1897 (Engel 1931, 69ff.). It contained a solid bracelet similar to the solid bracelet in Berlin (Fig. 3.7). For the dating of such solid bracelets, the hoard of Londzyn, in the former county of Löbau (now Łązyn, the district of Nowe Miasto Lubawskie, in the Warmian Masurian voivodeship), can be used. It contained coins of the English King Stephen of Blois (1135–1154), which allows us to presume the middle of the 12th century as the time of burying the treasure (Kemke 1931, 153). Very similar bracelets to the pieces

in the Berlin Museum were found in 1883 in Kiwitten (now Kiwity, in the Warmian Masurian voivodeship) (Cowentz 1888, 19ff.) (Fig. 4).

The Hørdum treasure in northern Jutland also contained a solid bracelet (Fig. 5). The hoard is dated to the ninth century (Roesdahl 1992, 265, No 148). Hørdum and Londzyn may give a time scale for the lifespan of such bracelets from the ninth to the twelfth century.

The best parallel to the silver spiral ring from both Skomętno hoards is from the treasure of Marienhof. It contained six silver spiral rings, and the solid bracelet which was mentioned before (Fig. 3). Mateusz Bogucki, who examined the objects from the Marienhof hoard, based on their decoration, dated the spiral rings to the second and third quarters of the 11th century (Bogucki 2003, 218).

Besides Marienhof, two hoards from Latvia may shed further light on the dating of the silver spiral rings. The treasure from Pudžas, in the district of Jelgavas, is dated to about 1000 AD. A coin from Otto III dates the



Fig. 4. Solid bracelets from the Kiwitten hoard (now Kiwity, Warmian Masurian voivodeship (after Kemke, 1931, 148). Not to scale.

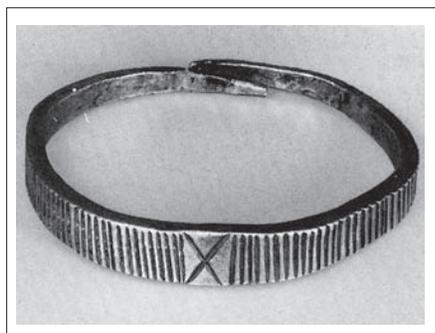


Fig. 5. A solid bracelet from the Hørdum hoard, North Jutland Peninsula, Denmark. Diameter seven centimetres (after Roesdahl 1992, 265).

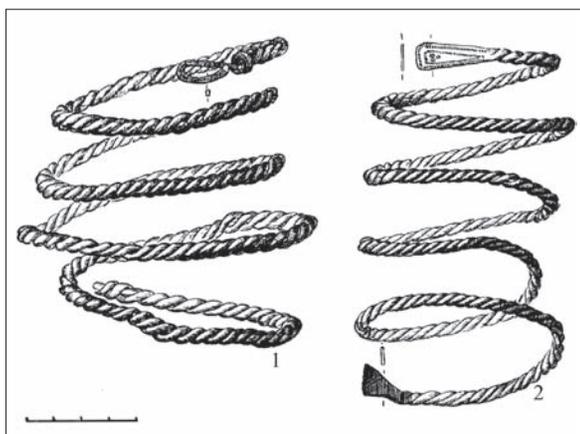


Fig. 6. The two silver spiral rings from the hoard from Jaunzemji, Liepāja district, Latvia (after Urtāns 1977, 175, Fig. 83).

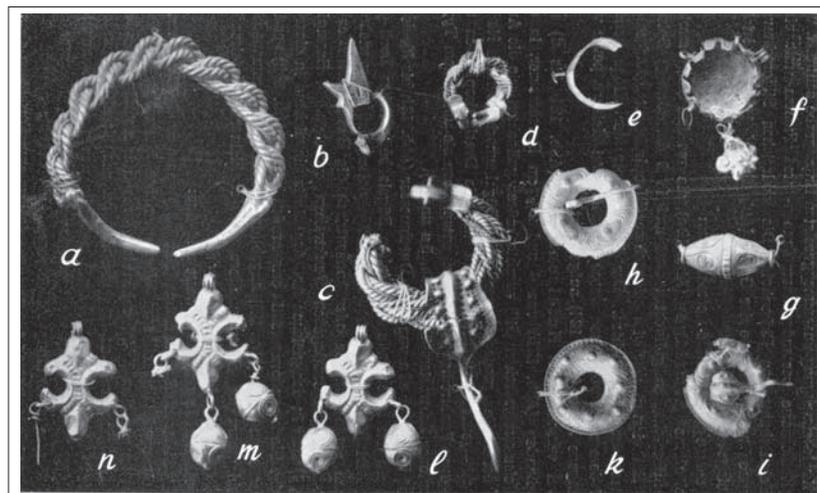


Fig. 7. The hoard from Gėliogaliai (Molėtai district, Lithuania. (after Engel, 1931, 81, Fig. 12).

treasure of Jaunzemji, in the district of Liepāja (Urtāns 1977, 175ff., Figs. 83, 87) (Fig. 6). There are spiral rings from Gotland, from Botels and Mallgords, dating to the end of the tenth century. The ends of these loops are more solid than the sheet silver ends of the rings we have in Berlin. Perhaps this is proof of their younger dating, for typological reasons which would support the dating of Bogucki.

The hoard from 1927 contained two penannular brooches with animal heads. The best parallels to these pieces were found in the hoards from Skaudvilė (Tauragė district, Lithuania), Antakščiai and Gėliogaliai (both in the Molėtai district, Lithuania) (Fig. 7). Lithuanian archaeologists date these brooches to the time between the 13th and the 15th century. Normally, penannular brooches with animal heads are typical of the tenth to the twelfth century in the Baltic region, the heads does not seem to be a chronological feature. In Gotland such brooches have been dated by Lena Thunmark-Nylén (her Type 8b) to her phases VIII:2 to VIII:4 (ca. 900-1200) (Thunmark-Nylén 2006, 110, 115f.; see also Müller-Wille 1989, 751ff.)<sup>3</sup>.

For Lithuanian archaeology, brooches such as that as in the hoard of Skomętno are an advanced form of normal brooches with animal heads, and therefore later. There is no doubt that the hoard of Gėliogaliai cannot be dated to before the 13th century, because of the disc-shaped brooches (Fig. 7.h, i-k). But in this hoard, both penannular brooches are damaged. This could be a sign for antique pieces. Concerning the development of forms, we generally have a development from simple to advanced forms, or from elaborated forms to simple forms. In this special case, could it be possible that such brooches are, regarding their typological aspects, closer to Viking Age brooches of the Gothic Upland Group dating from the tenth century? (Müller-Wille 1989, 74ff.) (Fig. 8).

<sup>3</sup> Friendly advice from colleague Norbert Gossler (†).



Fig. 8. Viking Age brooches of the Gothic Upland Group. Gotland and Eskelhem, Gotland. Diameter 7.1 centimetres, and seven centimetres (after Thunmark-Thylén 1998, pl. 114.1-2).



Fig. 9. A cross pendant from the Hiddensee hoard (Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, Germany). Length 6.9 centimetres (after Armbruster, Eilbracht 2010, 95).

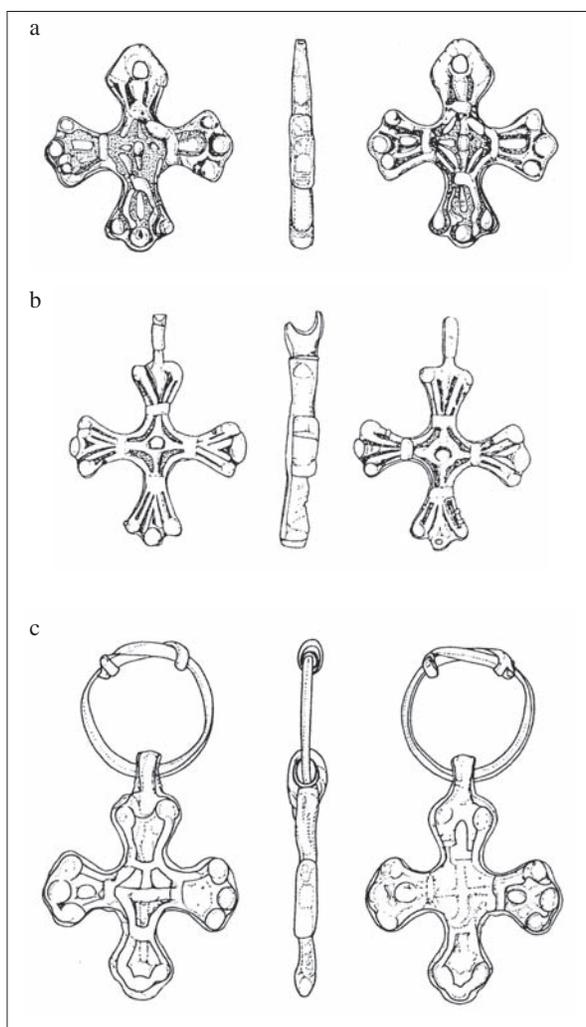


Fig. 10 a-c. Cross pendants from a) Allmäninge, Valbo parish, Gästrikland, Sweden; b) Sandegårda, Sanda parish in Gotland; c) Scania, no site. Length 2.8 centimetres, 3.3 centimetres, and three centimetres (after Staecker 1999, 518).



Fig. 11. A hollow bead from the Gėliogaliai hoard (Molėtai district, Lithuania). Length five centimetres (after Butrimas, Aleksiejūnas 2006, 557, Fig. 46).

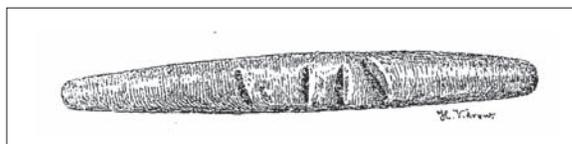


Fig. 12. A silver ingot from Groß Pöppeln (now Retschki, Rajon Polesk, Kaliningrad Oblast). Length 12.6 centimetres (after Prussia 1900, 278, Fig. 79).

The composition of the pendants from the necklace of the 1927 find reminds us of the composition of the famous pendants with bead and cross from the Hiddensee treasure in Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, Germany (Fig. 9), and the Michalowski Monastery in Kiev dating from the tenth century (William et al. 2013, 132; Stenberger 1958, 171ff.). What differentiates the pieces from Skomętno, Hiddensee and Kiev, besides the quality of the pieces, is the fact that the pendants from Hiddensee and Kiev are one-piece pendants. The cross pendants of Skomętno have to be seen in the context of cast cross pendants with three flat buckles at the ends of the arms, which have been found in Sweden, Finland and Russia. Examples of these pendants come from the

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| Katalog-Nr. <u>I<sup>a</sup> 1563<sup>a</sup></u><br>Inventar-Nr. <u>II 43-99</u><br>Akten-Nr. <u>262.98</u><br>Frühere Nr.   | Fundort: <u>Crantz</u><br><u>Kr. Fischhausen</u><br>Standort: | Zeichnung:<br>  |
| Gegenstand: <u>9 Silberbarren, bratförmig.</u><br><u>Z. T. m. (1-14) ein gefauenen</u><br><u>Marken (g) ist in einer sol-</u><br><u>chen Marke zerbrochen.</u><br><u>Ein anderer auf Ende beschädigt.</u><br><u>L. 120 - 157 mm</u> |   | Vorbesitzer (Jahr und Art der Erwerbung):<br><u>v. Mauntz in Charlottenberg</u><br><u>Ankauf</u><br><u>Z. J. II 378.98.</u> |
| Fundumstände: <u>n. I<sup>a</sup> 1563<sup>a</sup></u>  |   | Bemerkungen:  |

Fig. 13. A filing card of the Museum für Vor- und Frühgeschichte, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin with ingots from the Crantz hoard (now Zelenogradsk, Rajon Zelenogradsk, Kaliningradskaja Oblast).

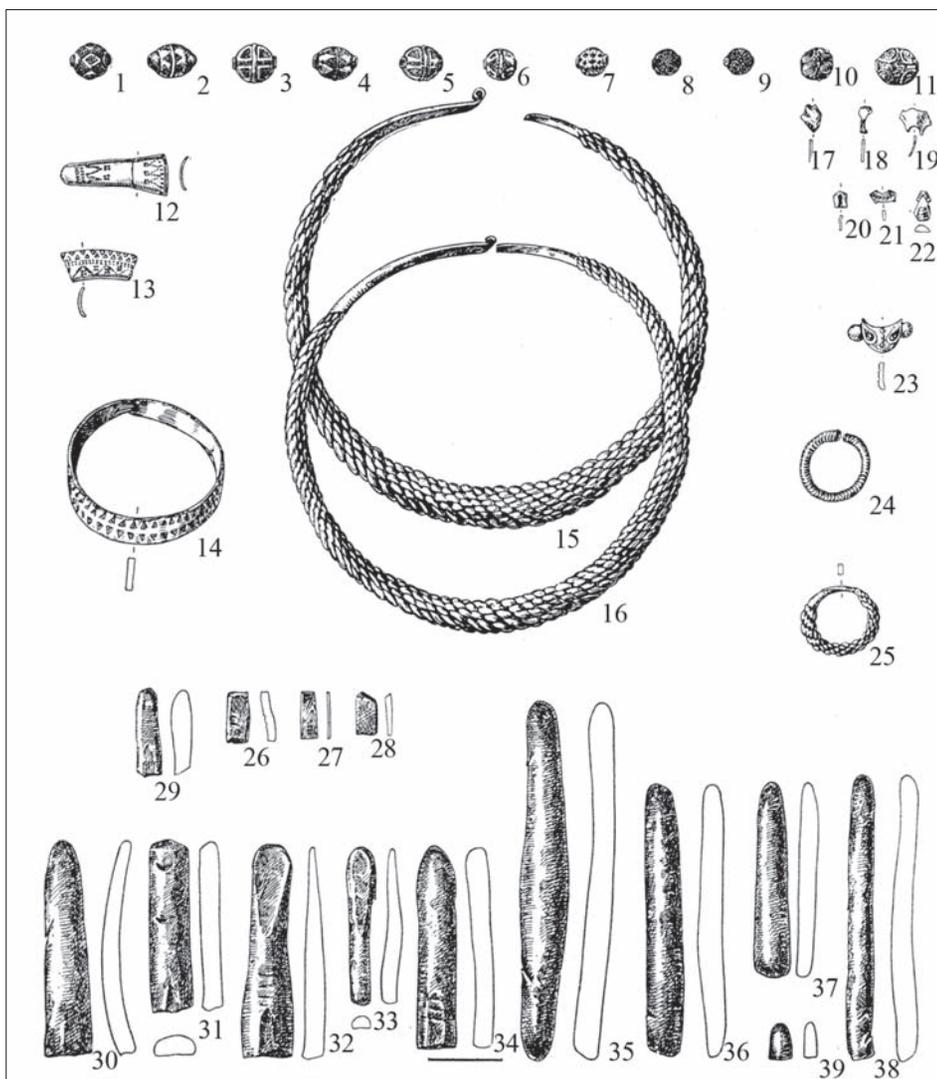


Fig. 14. The hoard from Lielvārdes Ipšas, Ogres district, Latvia (after Urtāns 1977, 187, Fig. 93).

hoard from Valbo (12th century) (Thunmark-Nylén 1995, 177) and the Swedish hoards from Allmänninge, Sandegarda, Runsberga and Skane, with coins dating from 1083 to 1128 AD (Staecker 1999, catalogue Nos 52, 56, 78b, 116b) (Fig. 10 a-c). Almost identical is a pendant presented on the website *Viking-cross.com*. This website is a project by different collectors with finds from the Migration Period. Most of the objects shown seem to be from illegal excavations.

Hollow beads made from silver sheet are typical of Scandinavian and Slavonic find complexes dating from the ninth to the 11th century. As an example of hollow beads made of silver sheet in the Warmian Masurian voivodeship, we have beads in the hoard from Olbrachtówko, dating from the tenth or the first half of the 11th century (Czonstke, Koperkiewicz 2013, 247, Pl. 2.20-29). Very similar beads came from the hoard of Stakliškės in the Prienai district in Lithuania. They have been dated to the 11th to the 13th century (Daugudis 1968, 11).

The hoard from Gėliogaliai (13th to 14th centuries) that we mentioned before also contained a hollow bead very similar to the pieces from Skomętno (Engel 1931, 82ff., Fig. 12) (Fig. 11).

The Skomętno hoard from 1927 contains objects (penannular brooches, silver beads) very similar to pieces which were found in the hoard of Gėliogaliai. In Skomętno, typical objects from the 13th century or later are missing, and also the whole composition of the hoard seems to suggest a dating to the 12th century.

The find at the Museum für Vor- und Frühgeschichte may be earlier. The spiral ring and solid bracelets are very similar to the find from the Marienhof hoard. Also, the composition of the two hoards, with spiral ring and solid bracelets, is the same. Therefore, the dating of the Marienhof hoard by Bogucki (second half of the eleventh century) should be applied to the second hoard of Skomętno.

### Silver ingots

A remarkable difference between the finds from Skomętno can be seen in the 14 ingots of the Berlin complex. The cast ingots belong to Type 1 after Ralf Wiechmann. Type 1 can be dated from the ninth to the 12th century (Wiechmann 1996, 66ff.). On the distribution map, Wiechmann left out his Type 1 for the former territory of East Prussia. In Gotland, ingots of Type 1 can be dated from the ninth to the 11th century. There are no notches on these ingots, as we have on the ingots from Skomętno. In Norway, such ingots are dated to the tenth century, and in Western Europe and

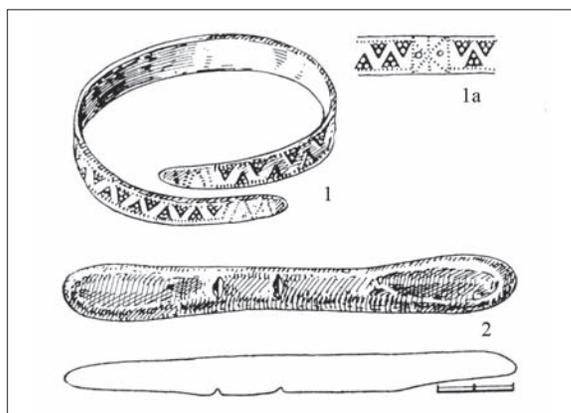


Fig. 15. The hoard from Grumalti, Riga district, Latvia (after Urtāns 1977, 198, Fig. 102).

Great Britain to the ninth century (Stenberger 1958, 91, 229, 235, Figs. 200.24, 201.24m, 220.9, 229.5, 228; Wiechmann 1996, 67; Coupland 2011, 121ff., Fig. 5.3; Pedersen 2011, 166ff., Fig. 7.8; Øhre Askie 2011, 180).

Type 1 ingots with notches have been found in the former territory of East Prussia in the hoards from Olschöwen, the former county of Treuburg (now Olszewo, Warmian Masurian voivodeship) (13 ingots with notches), and Groß Pöppeln, the former county of Labiau (now Retschki, Russian Federation) (31 pieces) (Fig. 12). Olschöwen is dated to the 12th century (Alterthümerfund 1859, 108ff.; Bogucki 2003, 18). Groß Pöppeln, compared by Bezenberger to the hoard from Kahlebude, in the former county of Karthaus (west Prussia, now Kolbudy, Pommeranian voivodeship), contained Ottonian coins (La Baume 1938, 51).

From the west Prussian Hornikau, in the former county of Berent (now Nowa Karczma, Pommeranian voivodeship), a hoard discovered in the year 1890, with coins, ingots with notches and jewellery, dated to the 12th century, was delivered by Wolfgang La Baume (La Baume 1938, 50, 60). Ingots with notches were also reported for the *Hacksilberfund* of Crantz, discovered in 1892 (Fig. 13). Bought by the Museum für Vor- und Frühgeschichte in 1898, the finds were taken by the Red Army in 1945, and are now in the Pushkin Museum in Moscow. The hoard is dated to the late tenth century. According to a new report by Annika Sirkin, a hoard was found in in Garbick near Bledau (now Sosnowka, Russian Federation) (Sirkin 2015, 83, 186).

A lot of hoards with ingots are known from the Baltic countries. Two examples may be enough for this presentation. A hoard was found in 1884 at Lielvārdes Ipšas, in the district of Ogres (Fig. 14). The hoard contained four ingots and eight pieces of ingots, and can be dated by the coins to between 1050 and 1100 AD (Urtāns 1977, 186ff., Fig. 93; Wiechmann 1996,

586 No 135; Carnap-Bornheim et al. 2006, 132). In 1937, in Grumalti, in the county of Riga, a hoard with a bracelet and one ingot was discovered, dated to the 11th or 12th century (Šnore 1938, 183, Fig. 6d; Urtāns 1977, 198, Fig. 102; Wiechmann 1996, 586, No 134) (Fig. 15). In Latvia, hoards with silver ingots dated by the coins belong to the whole of the 11th century (Šnore 1938, 194).

Wolfgang La Baume wrote that hoards with ‘hack-silver’ are typical of the Slavic area west of the River Vistula and western East Prussia in the tenth and the eleventh century. There is no evidence of them in the ‘Old Prussian territory’ (La Baume 1938, 62).

The new finds from Olbrachtówko and Mózgowo (both in the Warmian Masurian voivodeship) which can be dated to the second half of the 11th century confirm the thesis of La Baume of hack-silver hoards in western East Prussia (Bogucki et al. 2013, 209). In the central and eastern part of former East Prussia, hoards with hack-silver or coins are absent. Here we have hoards with ingots and jewellery (Skomętno, Olschöwen), or jewellery only (Marienhof). In Latvia, we have hoards with coins and ingots also dating from the late tenth to the twelfth century. These datings do not contradict the chronology for the second hoard of Skomętno, which may signify a different form of monetary economy in this region. According to Sebastian Brather, the ingots in the hoards from Scandinavia and the south Baltic regions are proof of development to *Gewichtsgeldwirtschaft* (Brather 1999, 191). The notches on the ingots may demonstrate a kind of monetary economy, for example, a sign of financial operation. Examinations made by the Conservation Department in the Berlin Museum showed that these notches are definitely not benchmarks.

### The historical context

Skomętno is situated in the former territory of the Sudovian tribe. Engels describes three hill-forts near the village. The name of the hill-fort in the south of the former ‘Skomentener See’ was until 1945 castle of Scomant (Fig. 16).

A leader called Skomant or Scumand is mentioned as the leader of the Sudovian tribe during their struggle against the Teutonic Order. According to Peter von Dusburg, the Sudovians were the most powerful Prussian tribe, and the last one to resist the Teutonic Order. In 1283 AD, the Sudovians gave up their resistance. Their last leaders Iedetus and Scurdo were christened, and withdrew to Lithuania. Sudovia ‘*remanet desolata usque in presentem diem*’ (Peter von Dusburg, Chron. 219).

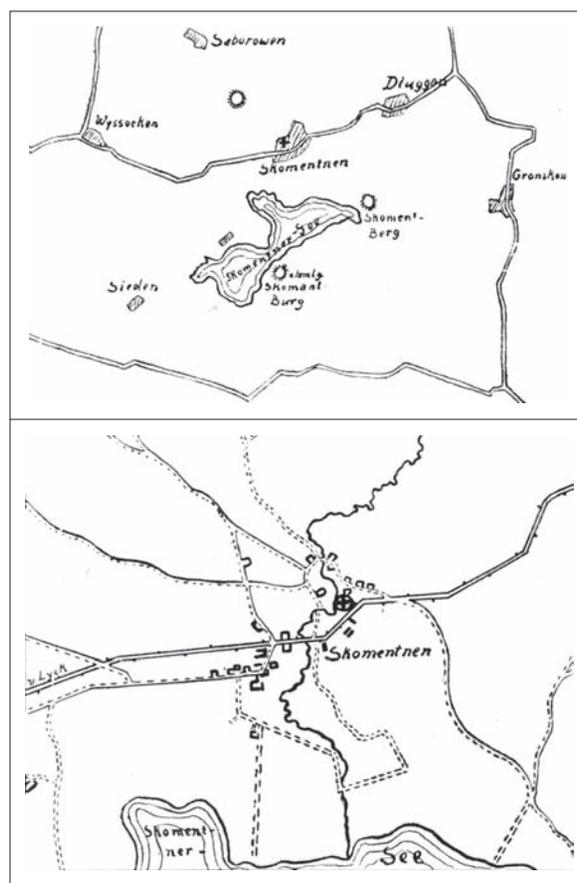


Fig. 16a-b. Maps of Skomętno and its surroundings, with Skomantburg (a), and Skomętno (b), with the site of the hoard from 1927. a) + find place; O hill fort; b) + find place (after Engel 1931, 69; Figs. 2-3).

These events seem to be the reason for Engels dating the 1927 hoard to the 13th century, and a good example of his attempt to connect archaeological finds with the historical tradition.<sup>4</sup>

It is difficult to decide if the two hoards from Skomętno are deposits for religious or profane reasons. There are very interesting reflections by Christoph Huth concerning Bronze Age and Viking Age hoards (Huth 2009, 41ff.).

Although in their composition nearly identical, Bronze Age hoards were mostly interpreted as sacrifices, and Viking Age hoards always as deposits. So it is impossible to reinterpret the hoards of Skomętno as a result of the religious imagination, distempered times, or trade. The distempered times in this region, when the two hoards were buried, are well known, and all the interpretations mentioned above can be an expression for distempered times.

As archaeological proof of the conflicts between the Prussians and their Polish, Lithuanian, Danish and

<sup>4</sup> For the problem of the different places with the name Skomant, see: Bliujienė et al. 2012, 107.

German neighbours from the tenth to the thirteenth century, we have not only deposits. There is more archaeological evidence. In his study of 'Prussian graves in Samland', Roman Shiroukhov could demonstrate the militarisation of the material culture in the grave goods (Shiroukhov 2012, 251).

### Both hoards of Skomętno: conclusions

With the purchase of the silver hoard from the former territory of East Prussia, some aspects of Viking Age hoards in the Baltic region, and especially the 'Skomanten hoard' from 1927, can be discussed.

Looking at parallels with the jewellery from the find from 1927, and the jewellery and ingots from the hoard, bought by the Museum of Prehistory, and the chronology of the objects, the 'treasures' seem to have been hidden at different times. Even though the find from 1927 has its best analogy in the objects from Gėliogaliai, the composition and condition of the jewellery suggests an earlier date, in the 12th century.

The 'second' hoard of Skomętno seems to be earlier, because of the trinkets and its composition of jewellery and ingots. The composition of the spiral ring and solid bracelet can also be observed in the hoard from Marienhof. The dating of the Marienhof hoard made by Bogucki 'generally within the second and third quarter of the 11th century' seems therefore equally probable for this find (Bogucki 2003, 218).

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## ANTRASIS LOBIS IŠ SKOMANTŲ

### HEINO NEUMAYER

#### Santrauka

Ilgijus [muziejui] sidabro lobį iš buvusios Rytų Prūsijos teritorijos, čia aptariami tam tikri nauji vikingų laikotarpio lobių Baltijos regione, taip pat „lobio“ iš Skomantų (lenk. *Skomętno*, vok. *Skomentnen, Skomanten*), rasto 1927 m., aspektai (1–16 pav.). Ieškant paralelių papuošalams iš 1927 m. radinių ir papuošalams bei lydiniams, nupirktiems Priešistorės ir ankstyvosios istorijos muziejaus (Berlyne), bei tyrinėjant jų chronologiją, ryškėja, kad „lobio“ objektai buvo paslėpti skirtingu laiku. Nors 1927 m. radiniai artimiausią analogiją turi tarp Gėliogalių (Lietuva, Molėtų r.) lobio papuošalų, jų kompozicija ir būklė byloja apie ankstyvesnę datavimą, sietiną su XII a.

Antrasis „lobis“ iš Skomantų, regis, yra ankstyvesnis dėl paviršiaus blizgesio ir papuošalų bei sidabro lydinų-lazdelių kompozicijos. Įvijinio žiedo ir masyvios apyrankės derinys taip pat aptiktas Marienhofo lobyje. M. Boguckis Marienhofo lobį datavo „apskritai XI a. antru–trečiu ketvirčiu“. Taigi panašus datavimas taikytinas ir šiame straipsnyje aptariamam radiniui.

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