

Aleksander Bursche
and Kyrylo Myzgin

Late Roman gold and political power in the *Barbaricum*: an outline

We begin our contribution with the following piece of important background information¹: no confirmed gold or silver ore deposits of crucial significance were explored in Antiquity in central and northern Europe. Any precious metal used in the region would have been imported, mainly from the Roman Empire².

In the central and northern *Barbaricum*, the first still rather rare gold and gilded finds are noted in inventories of elite graves identified with the Lubieszewo-Lübsow horizon³. They become more numerous in the second half of the 2nd century and are noted in assemblages of the Öremölla-Czarnówko horizon, associated with the development of a so-called Baroque style in local gold-work, especially in the Baltic region (Fig. 1)⁴. Nevertheless, they continue to be relatively rare and appear mostly in the richest burial inventories known from northern Poland and southern Scandinavia.

A marked increase in the occurrence of gold objects in the *Barbaricum* is apparent after the middle of the 3rd century. By this time gold had become abundant — in the form of coins and locally made items, recorded in some princely graves of the Leuna-Hassleben horizon and in deposits and single finds recorded in Germanic central-eastern and northern Europe. The fundamental question is this: what were the sources of all of this gold, and under which circumstances had it entered the region?

An extraordinary discovery of Roman gold coins, mid-3rd century issues, cut in pieces was made in occupied Poland during the construction of a Luftwaffe airfield outside the village of Stara Wieś, in Podlasie (now north-eastern Poland), in the spring of 1941; the Germans were preparing for their offensive against Soviet Russia⁵. The practice of bending, breaking, and cutting objects into fragments is well known in the *Barbaricum* (Map 1). This was how the Germanic warriors dealt with the spoils of war (Fig. 2).

The Stara Wieś hoard was a starting point for our research into Roman gold from barbarian contexts, dis-

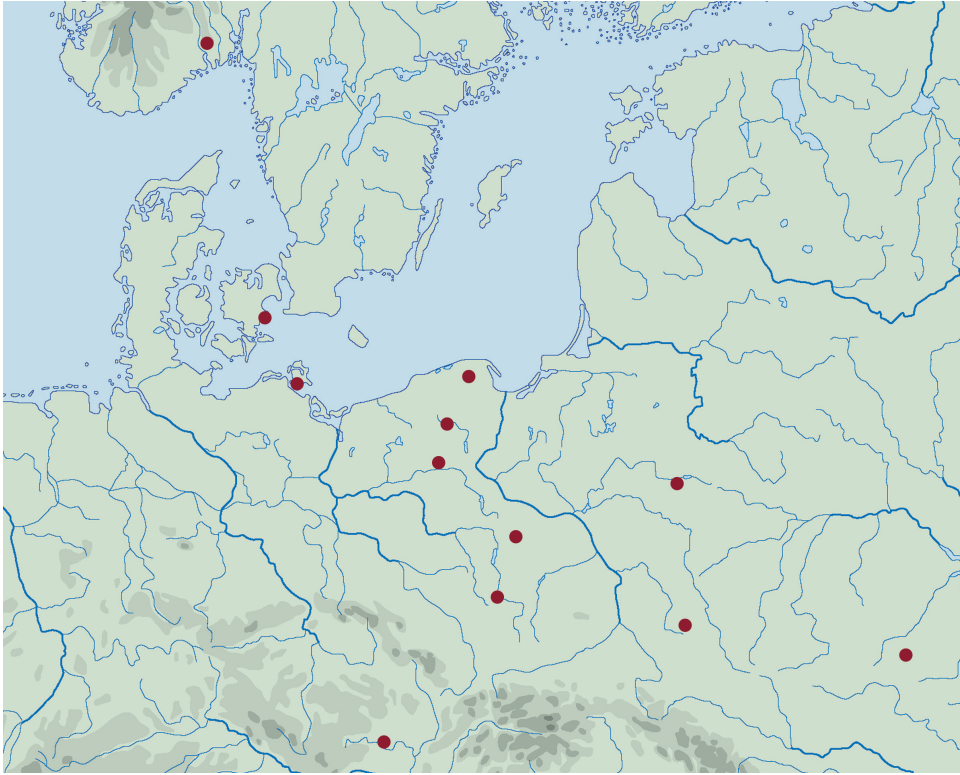
1 This research was funded in whole by the National Science Centre, Poland, Project *The neural network of solidi. Contacts between Romano-Byzantine and barbarian worlds in the light of die-linked gold coins found in Europe and Central Asia* (no. 2020/39/B/HS3/01513), implemented at the Faculty of Archaeology, University of Warsaw.

2 Bursche 1983, 76–78; Voss 1999, 290; Jouttijärvi 2009, 251; Natuniewicz-Sekuła 2017, 217–218; Natuniewicz-Sekuła 2020, 105–106.

3 Schuster 2013; Elschek 2013.

4 Andersson 1993; 1995; 2008; Hedeager 1991; Jørgensen – Petersen 1998; Schuster 2010; Schuster 2018; Schuster 2021; Natuniewicz-Sekuła 2017; Natuniewicz-Sekuła 2020; Król 2018.

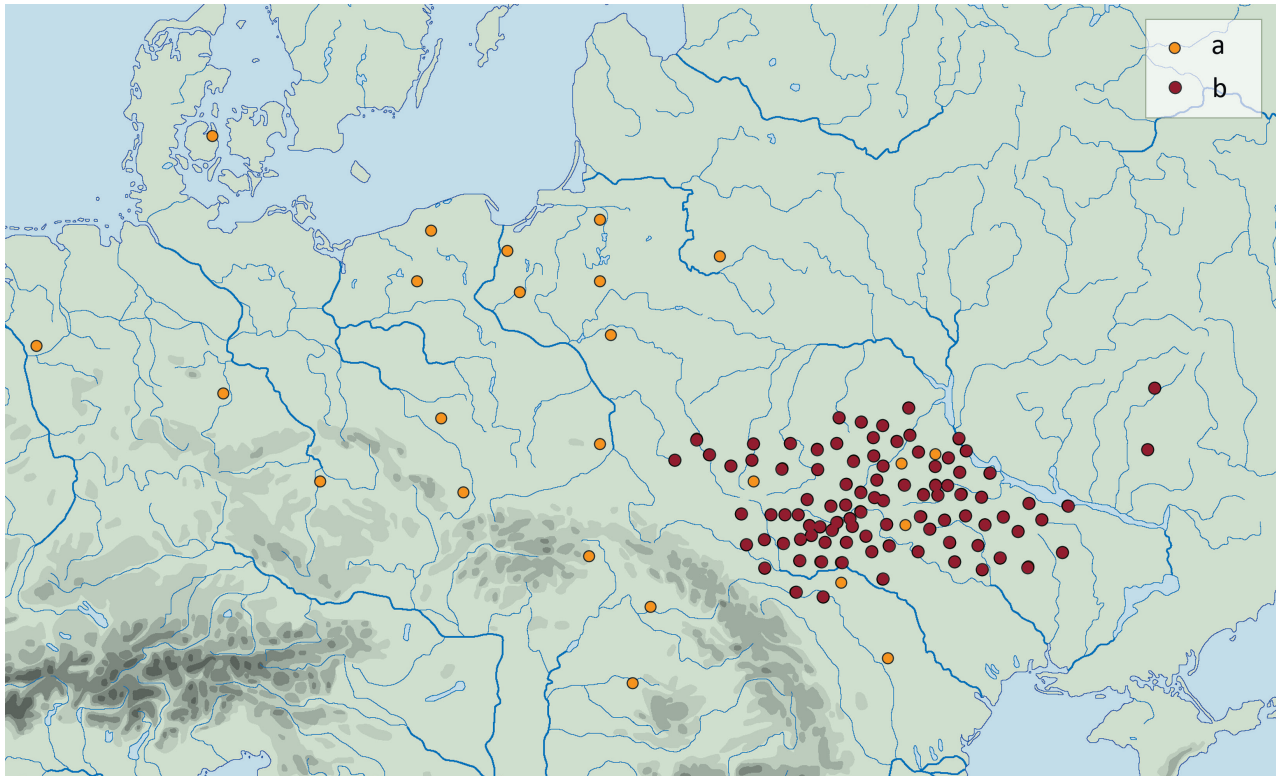
5 Bursche 2013; Bursche – Myzgin 2020.



Map 1 The distribution of grave assemblages (3rd c.) in the *Barbaricum* containing cut up gold objects.



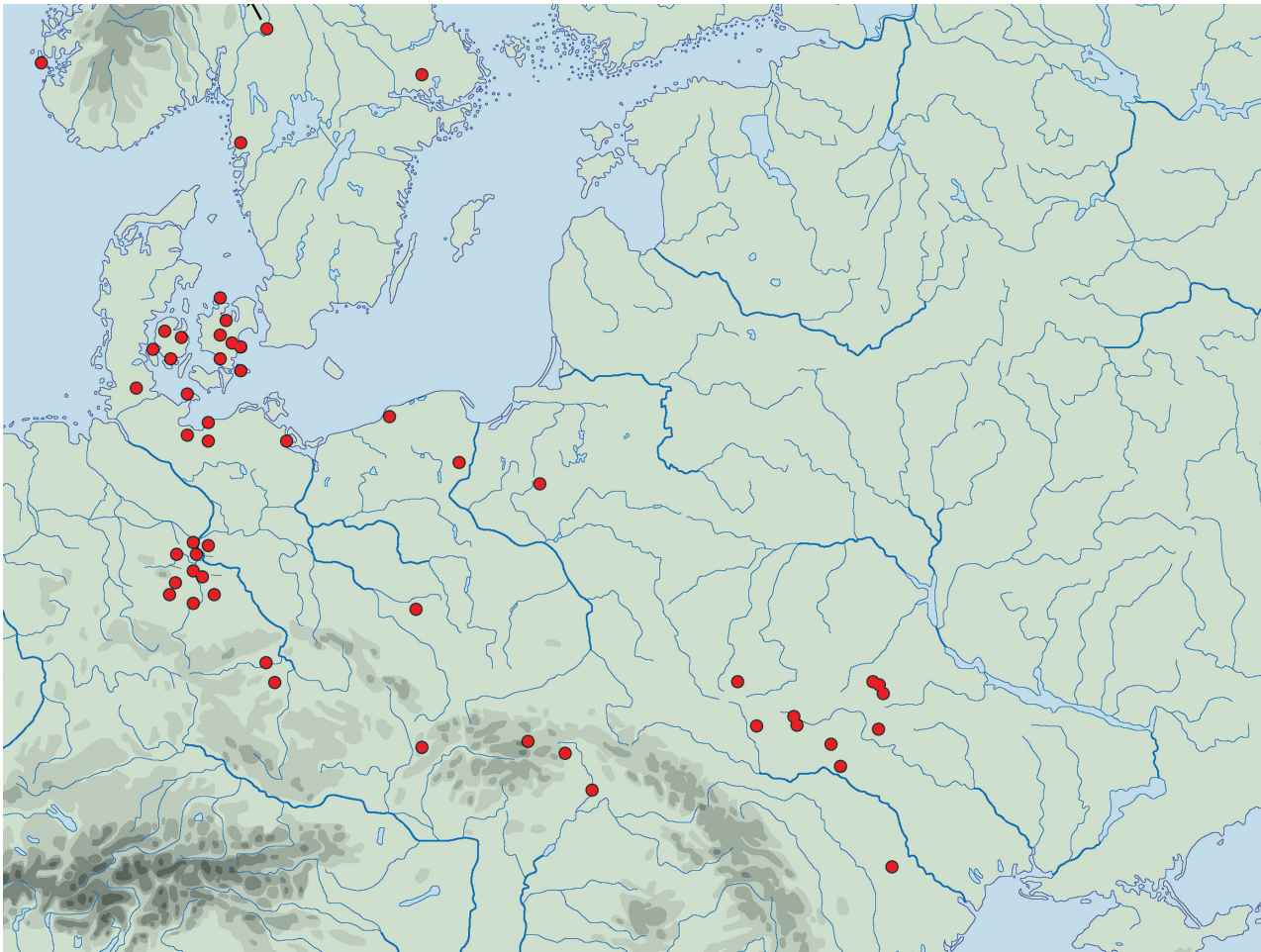
Fig. 1 Czarnówko / PL, site 5, feature R430.



Map 2 The distribution of mid-3rd c. *aurei*: a – finds with precise location; b – sites with approximate localization.



Fig. 2 Cut objects from bog deposit in Illerup Ådal, Jutland / DK.



Map 3 The distribution of the elite graves from the Late Roman Period (C1b–C3) in the *Barbaricum*.

cussed here only in passing as we have already published on this subject⁶. We found that the territory settled by Gothic societies in the second half of the 3rd century in what is now Poland and western Ukraine, harbours an astounding number of gold coins issued around the middle of the 3rd century, mainly during the reign of Decius, an emperor who ruled for less than 22 months (Map 2, Fig. 3)!

This period was a time of mass invasions of Germanic war retinues (*comitatus*) under the leadership of Goths into Roman provinces in the Lower Danube region. The Goths stormed and captured many cities in the Balkans, including Marcianopolis and Philippopolis (modern Plovdiv), and plundered them. In AD 251 Emperor Decius tried to prevent them from returning to their homeland but suffered a crushing defeat in the Battle of Abritus; the

Roman emperor and his son were both killed in battle⁷. The conclusion reached by Aleksander Bursche is that at Abritus the Goths seized the imperial treasury of tons of gold coins and possibly bars. Chemical analyses established the Roman provenance of gold we now find in the *Barbaricum*⁸. A. Bursche published his discovery for the first time in the *Numismatic Chronicle*⁹; his interpretation has gained wide acceptance among historians and numismatists¹⁰. The imperial treasury captured at Abritus was probably the main source of gold which subsequently spread across the central-eastern *Barbaricum* in the second half of the 3rd and early 4th centuries.

7 Gerov 1977, 131–37; Wolfram 1990, 55–57; Bleckmann 1992; Bleckmann 2016, 7–8; Birley 1998; Boteva 2001; Dimitrov 2005; Kolendo 2008.

8 Natuniewicz-Sekuła 2017; Natuniewicz-Sekuła 2020.

9 Bursche 2013.

10 Bland 2013, 272; Bland 2014, 95–99; Kulikowski 2016, 150–154; Wilczyński 2016, 302; Hostein 2017, 48; Ziolkowski 2017, 67–95; Mees 2018, 452; Heizmann 2019, 301; Cecconi – Hostein 2018, 73–86; Quast 2021, 304–305; Valenti 2021, 147–151; Potter 2022, 139–150.

6 Bursche – Niezabitowska 2017; Bursche – Myzgin 2020; Bursche – Łatałowa – Mączyńska 2020, 256–259.

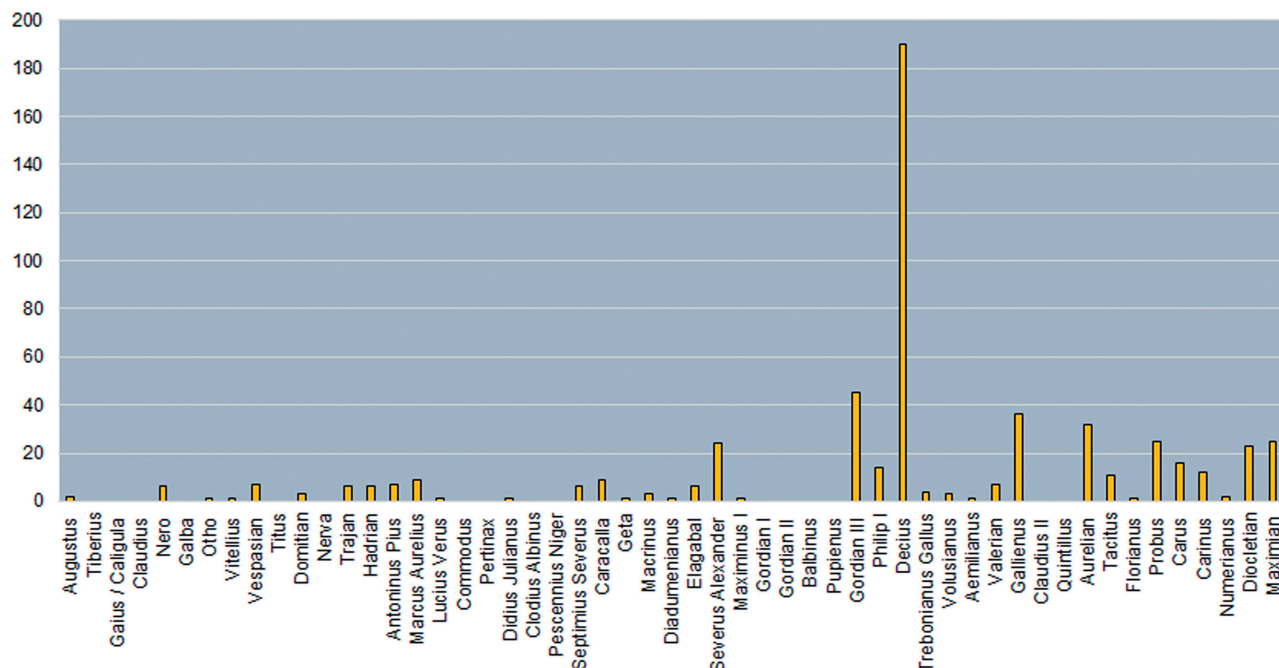


Fig.3 Chronological distribution of 1st - 3rd c. aurei found in Ukraine.

Another fascinating topic is the use of Roman gold coins within barbarian societies. In his paper published in the *Numismatic Chronicle*, A. Bursche suggested that gold coins with the portrait of the defeated emperor could be prestige objects used by the elite, in the first place by military leaders, who offered them to warriors as a reward for their valour on the battlefield.

This interpretation has since been confirmed by a passage in the palimpsest of the *Scythica Vindobonensia* discovered in the early 21st century. Jana Grusková came across fragments of an unknown ancient text in eight pages of a medieval Byzantine manuscript from the 11th century and identified them as a previously unknown fragment of the *Scythica* of Dexippus. A new invaluable account was gained of Gothic incursions into the Balkan provinces around AD 250, handed down — and this is crucial — by a contemporary of these events. Within the framework of a four year “*Scythica Vindobonensia*” project implemented by the Austrian Academy of Sciences, state-of-the-art technologies were used to decipher, interpret and publish this text¹¹. It includes a remarkable passage (Folio 195r, ll. 29—30 and Folio 195v, ll. 1—2), marginal to the main narrative, which sheds light on how coins were used within the Germanic environment, and,

more specifically, within the relationship between the ruler (Cniva) and his Gothic *comitatus*.

This is the first ancient text to offer insight into the role of coinage among the barbarians from the northeast. It describes how during the siege of Philippopolis, Cniva was persuaded by a refugee from the lower city to make a direct attack. He sent five men on a night-time reconnaissance, the men who had volunteered, tempted by a reward in coin:

Folio 195r¹²:

1. 29 (...) ἄθλα δὲ ἡ παρὰ τοῦ βασιλέως. τῷ μὲν

1. 30 πρώτῳ ἀνελθόντι· πεντακόσιοι δαρεικοί. δευ-

Folio 195v¹³:

1. 1 -τέρῳ δὲ τριακόσιοι. καὶ τρίτῳ τῷ μετὰ τοῦτον

1. 2 [...]τον. καὶ τοῖς ἄλλοις ὁμοίως.

“As prizes, the king offered 500 darics to the first man to climb the walls, and to the second 300, and to the third after him [...], and to the rest similarly”.

While the entire fragment has the nature of an anecdote and could be a literary device drawn from earlier sources used by Dexippus, it nevertheless might reflect — to some extent at least — the realities of the age. Certainly, the word *dareikoi* used to describe gold coins in a text written around AD 250 was an anachronism. If we

¹¹ Grusková 2010; Grusková 2012; Grusková – Martin 2014; Grusková – Martin 2015; Grusková – Martin 2017; Grusková – Martin 2019; Martin – Grusková 2014; Mallan – Davenport 2015.

¹² Martin – Grusková 2014, 36.

¹³ Grusková – Martin 2015, 38.

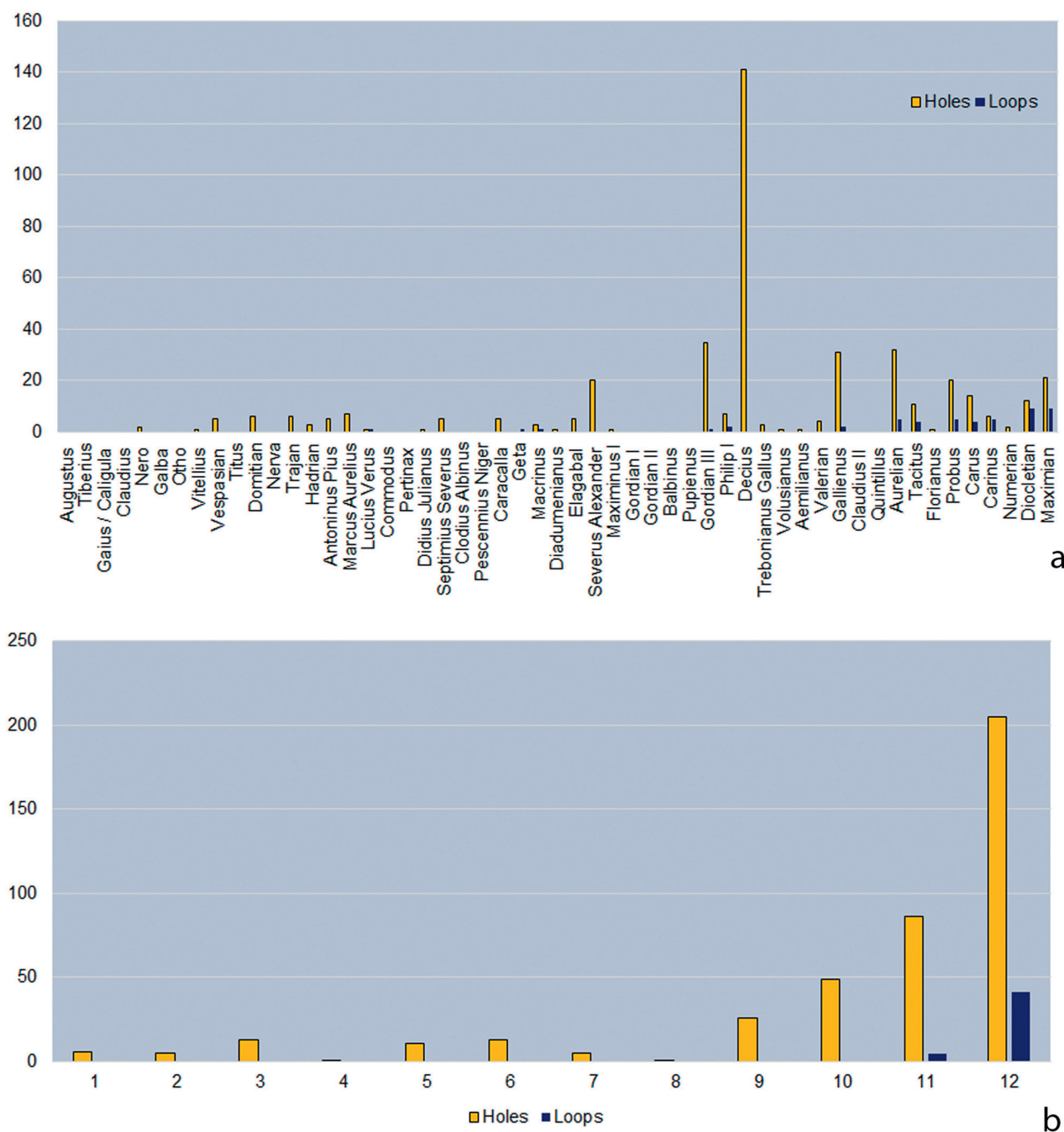


Fig. 4 Number of looped and pierced aurei in *Barbaricum* (a). — The location of holes in the 1st—3rd c. aurei from the *Barbaricum* (b).

bear in mind that Dexippus was an Athenian in the habit of using the terminology of Herodotus we can be assured that in his history written around the middle of the 3rd century *dareikoi* denote *aurei*, the main gold denomination of that age¹⁴. In any case, we have here a unique description of how the coins could have been distributed among the members of a Gothic retinue as part of the relationship of allegiance between the chieftain and

his *comitatus*. In this case, they were used as a form of payment.

A. Bursche has argued that once a larger quantity of *denarii* had been obtained by a barbarian military leader (or leaders) the coins were shared out among his men to reward them for merit in combat, proportionately to their contribution¹⁵. This seems to be the most logi-

¹⁴ Hostein 2017, 40—45; Bursche - Myzgin 2020, 221—223.

¹⁵ Bursche 2011, 83—84; Bursche 2018; cf. Rau 2010, 45—52; Horsnæs 2016, 129—134.

cal explanation for what is found in the archaeological record and has been confirmed by the passage in the *Scythica Vindobonensia*.

The same fragment provides the key as to how *aurei* seized by the Goths at Abritus approximately at the same time as Dexippus wrote his account, could have spread across practically the entire Gothic territory in east-central Europe. It is logical to assume that after the victory at Abritus, Roman coins were prestige objects which identified their owners as members of the military elite within barbarian society. More than 90% of gold coin finds from the territory of the *Barbaricum* have holes pierced from the obverse side, typically, above the head of the emperor (Fig. 4). No doubt the display of the portrait of the Roman emperor by representatives of the Germanic elite played an important role as a symbol and predestination of power, in the first place military power¹⁶. Roman gold coins of this description were found in rich grave inventories containing weapons and spurs recorded in western Ukraine and Germany. In a princely burial found at Ostrovany in Slovakia, an *aureus* of Decius was found alongside other prestige objects, e. g., a gold type *Kolben-armring* bracelet and a solid gold neckring (Fig. 5)¹⁷.

The National Ossoliński Institute in Wrocław has in its collections, an *aureus* of Postumus with a fascinating graffito in Greek writing — Φ ΓΟΥΝΘΙΟΥ (Fig. 6). The Ossoliński collection was amassed before World War II in L'viv (then Lwów) and as such comprises coin finds from that region. Consequently, it is safe to provenance this particular *aureus* to western Ukraine. The name written on the coin is probably Gunþijaz, the Gothic leader of *ingentia auxilia germanorum legio X Fretensis*¹⁸. In his brilliant prosopographical contribution, Edward Dąbrowa established that under Gallienus a *vexillatio* (detachment) of this legion was drawn to fight in the war against the Gallic Empire but defected and sided with Postumus¹⁹. Regardless of whether this very likely identification is correct, we have here a name on a Roman *aureus*, inscribed in the Greek alphabet, the name of the Gothic owner of this coin, and most probably, the leader of a barbarian *comitatus* fighting on the side of Postumus.

At first gold coins would have primarily been used to identify the owner as a member of a Gothic elite war ret-

inue as a military decoration, the mark of rank awarded by the ruling group. With time they could have taken on a different meaning, serving an apotropaic, decorative, or other function. We address this matter later on in our contribution.

In the second half of the 3rd century, the time of intensified political contacts between the Romans and the barbarians, gold objects start to play a key role as markers of political power. Most of the intact grave inventories of the Leuna-Hassleben-Stráże-Zakrzów horizon of princely graves (second half of the 3rd — early 4th centuries) contain gold Roman coins, brooches, bracelets, rings, pendants, and not infrequently, crescent-shaped *lunula* ornaments (Fig. 7)²⁰. Graves assigned to this archaeological horizon have a distribution which extends from southern Scandinavia to Central Europe, as far as western and central Ukraine (Map 3). This horizon is understood to reflect the process of the emergence of Germanic elites assisted partly by the growing influence of Early Germanic peoples as a valuable military force (especially after their victory at Abritus and the fall of the Upper Rhaetian *Limes* in the 260s). There is evidence during this period of similar processes in other parts of the *Barbaricum*²¹.

The situation in Crimea at the same period is different in some respects. Although soon after their arrival around the mid-3rd century the Goths had started using the territory of the Bosporan Kingdom as a springboard in a series of their sea campaigns of the 250s–260s, the local elite continued to be in power. Next to barbarian elite burials furnished as elsewhere in the *Barbaricum* with gold coins and Roman vessels, we find in this region richly furnished burials of the Bosporan nobility, one of them containing a stunning gold mask found in Kerch in 1837²². With time, starting from the second quarter of the 4th century, the Goths visibly play an increasingly important role in the Bosporan Kingdom, even entering the upper ranks of society. During this period Germanic burials are furnished with many gold and gold-plated objects, mostly in the polychrome style, produced in Crimea or in the Roman provinces²³.

A remarkable form which is noted across the wide territory of the *Barbaricum* in the late 3rd century and the first half of the 4th, are gold foil pendants stamped with

16 Bursche 2013; Bursche – Myzgin 2020; Bursche – Latałowa – Męczyńska 2020, 256–259.

17 Prohászka 2006.

18 Degler 2017.

19 Dąbrowa 2000.

20 Werner 1973; Quast 2009; Quast 2016; Grane 2010; Rau 2010, 212–215; Rau 2013; Bemmman 2014; Voss – Wigg-Wolf 2017; Becker 2019; Margreiter 2022.

21 see, e. g., Skvortsov 2012.

22 Sharov 2022, 27–42.

23 Sharov 2022, 127.



Fig.5 Ostrovany II
(Osztrópataka) / SK.



Fig.6 Aureus of Postumus with a Greek inscription, Ossolineum
collection in Wrocław.

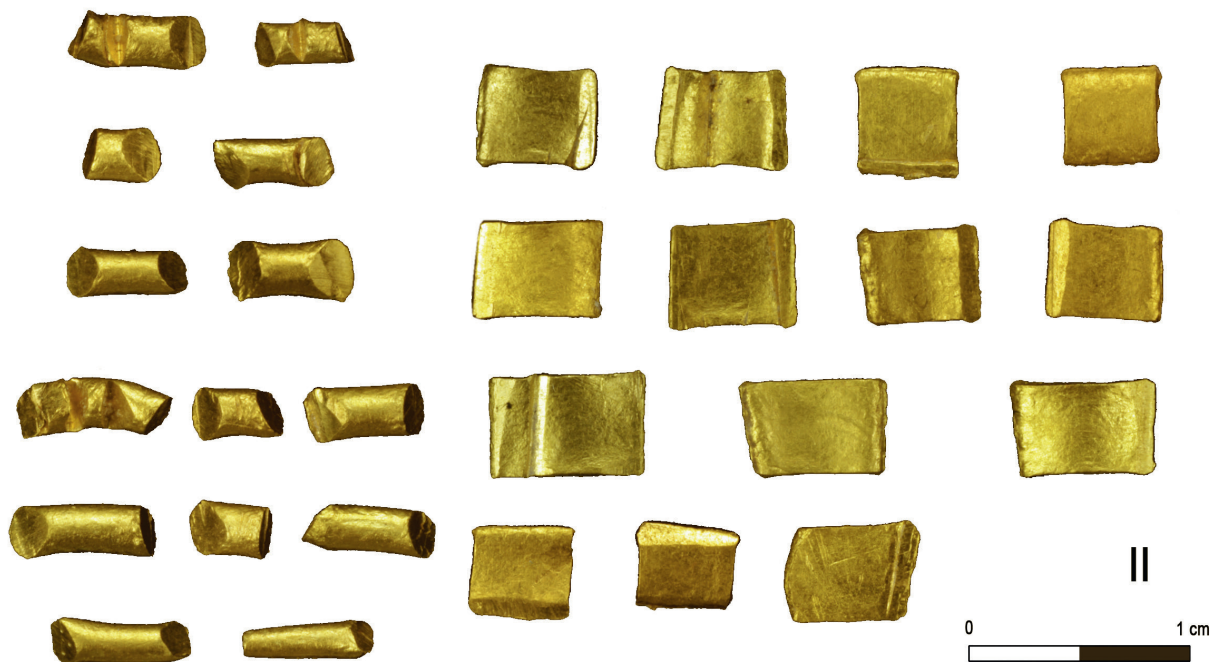
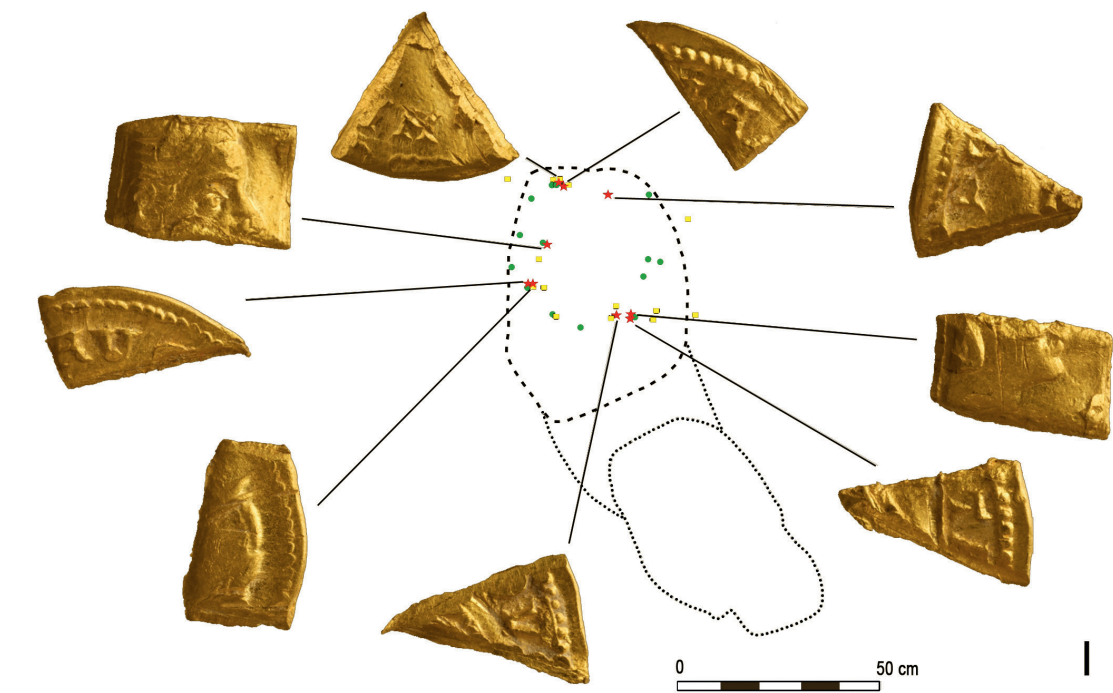
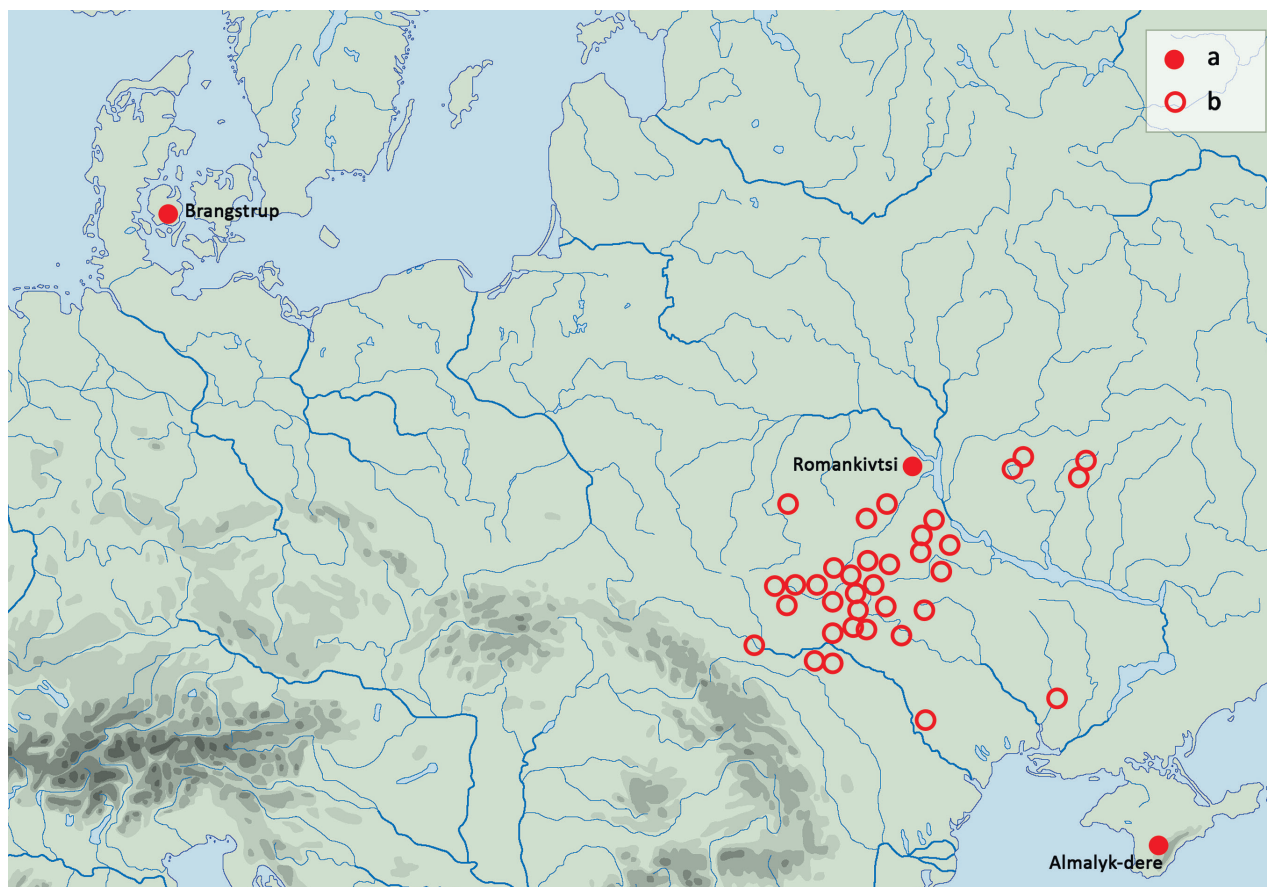


Fig.7 Ulów, Tomaszów Lubelski distr./ PL, site 7. Plan of grave 19 with the location of *aureus* fragments (I) together with wire and sheet fragments (II).



Map 4 The distribution of the Late Roman period gold foil pendants stamped with anthropomorphic and zoomorphic ornaments:
a – finds with precise location; b – finds with approximate location.

anthropomorphic and zoomorphic motifs. Their study started with two finds. The first consists of three stamped gold foil pendants recovered at Romankivtsi in Ukraine in 1847. Two of the pendants are pelta-shaped and one is round. The second find is a gold hoard found in 1865 at Brangstrup in Denmark. In addition to forty Roman gold coins (Trajan Decius to Constantine II) it included sixteen pendants of various form (Fig. 8). Five were made of gold foil, and were either pelta-shaped or rectangular, and impressed with distinctive anthropomorphic and zoomorphic designs²⁴. Two of the pelta-shaped pendants from Romankivtsi are stylistically similar to the pendants in the Brangstrup hoard. Today, a much larger series of pendants of this form is known of: Kyrlo Myzgin succeeded in recording at least several hundred amateur detectorist finds from Ukraine (Map 4)²⁵.

The general style design of images on these pendants was probably inspired by the Mediterranean tradition,

however only some of the pendants reflect the direct use of Classical motifs. The majority of them appear to be barbarian interpretations of Greek or Roman motifs and may also have included some elements from Germanic mythology. The distribution range of the gold foil pendants apparently overlaps with the distribution of 3rd century Roman gold coins. This suggests that the latter were the source of gold used in making the pendants, which in turn intimates the evolution of the function performed by Roman gold coins within barbarian societies²⁶.

Back in the day, Joachim Werner had already noted the link between Scandinavian and Ukrainian pendants and assigned them to the Dančeny-Brangstrup horizon,²⁷ identified by the presence of prestige objects in archaeological assemblages, e.g., rosette brooches with gold foil and appliqué. The distribution of these forms extends from southern Scandinavia to the Black Sea (Map 5)²⁸.

24 Alföldi 1934; Werner 1988; Henriksen 1992.

25 Myzgin 2019.

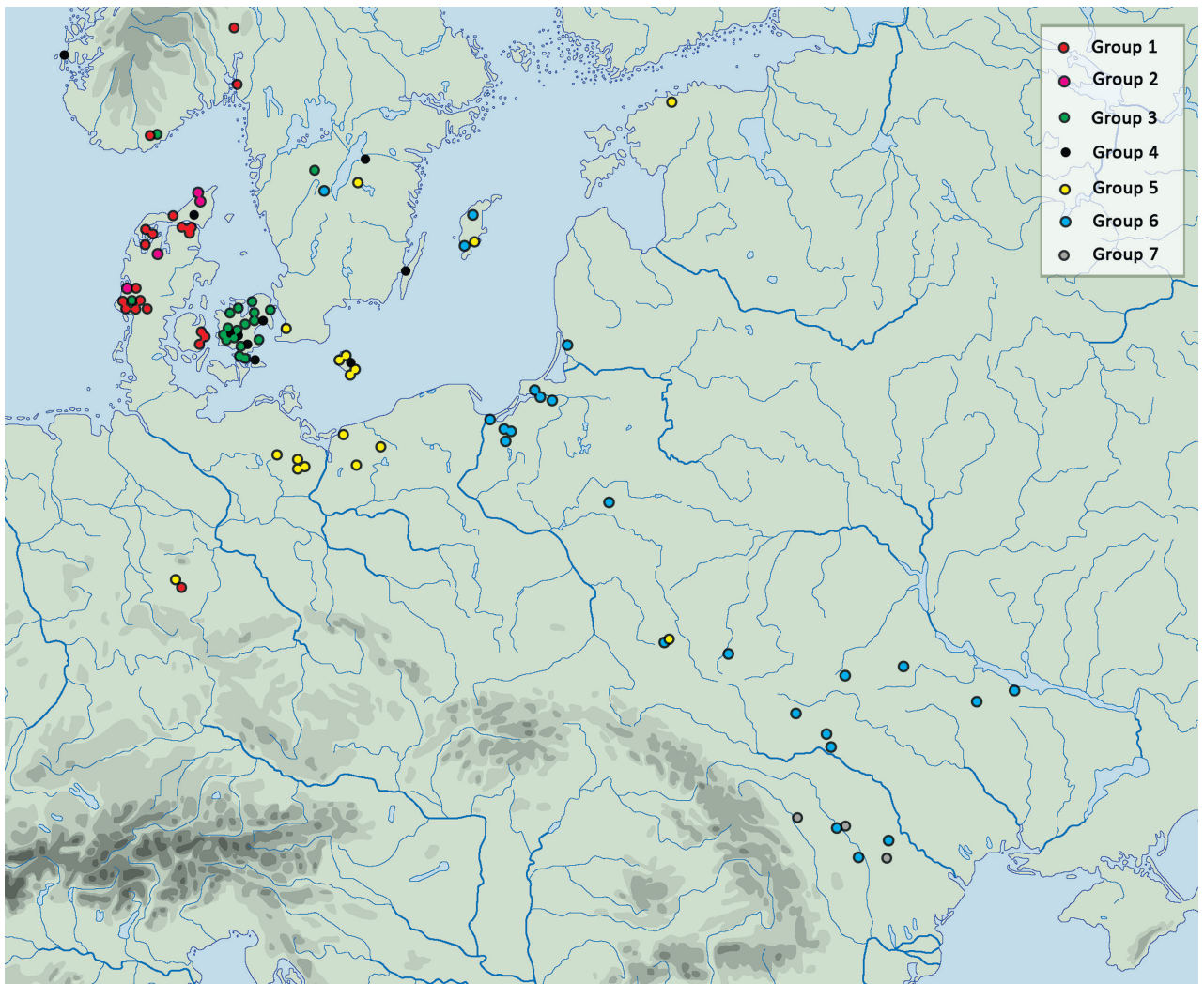
26 Myzgin 2019.

27 Werner 1988.

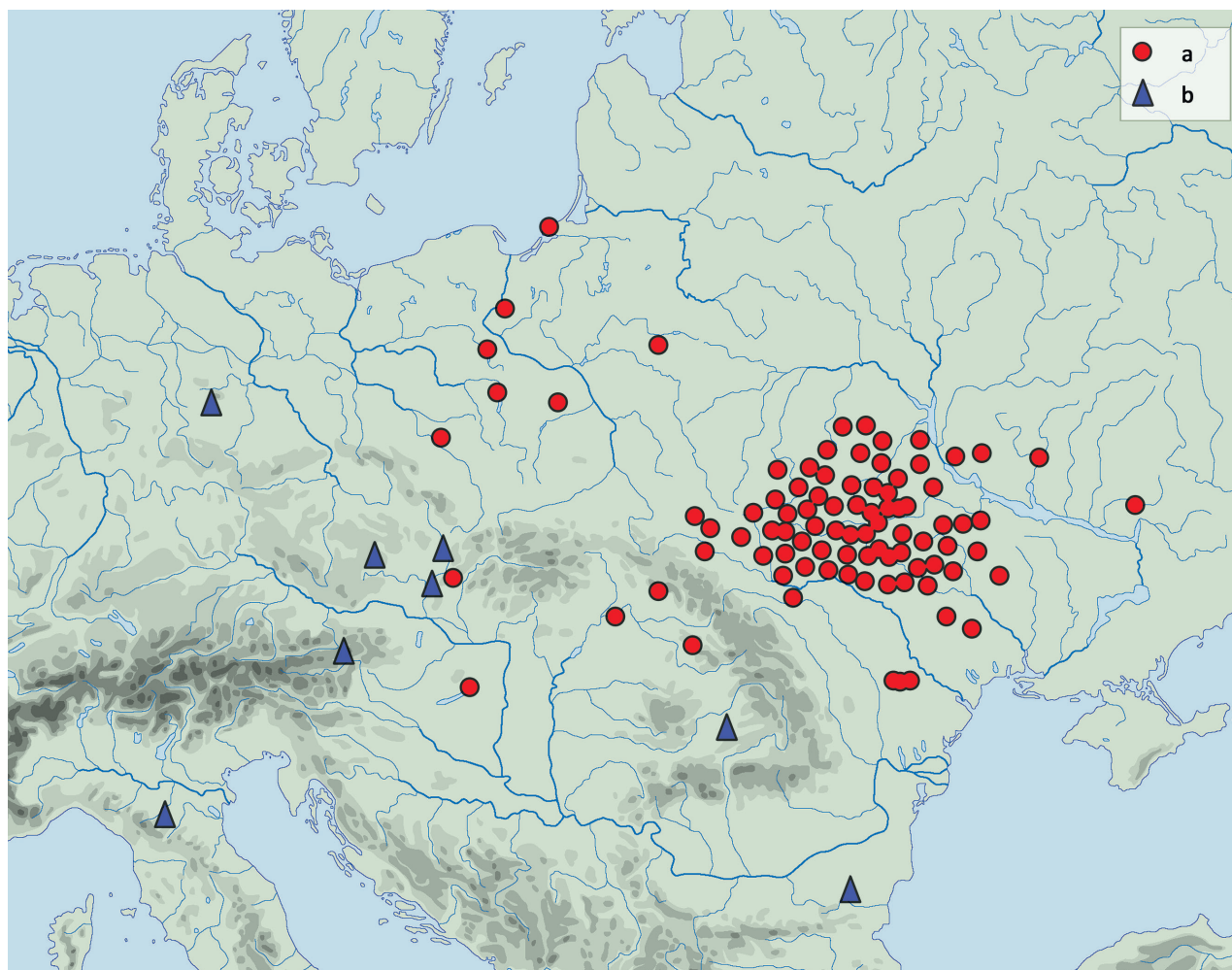
28 Lund Hansen – Przybyła 2010.



Fig.8 The Brangstrup Hoard /DK.



Map 5 Distribution of the rosette brooches.



Map 6 The distribution of the gold pelta-shaped and crescentic pendants without anthropomorphic/zoomorphic motifs: a – phases B2/C1–C2 (AD 150–320); b – phases D–E (AD 350–525).

Gold pendants, without ornament or decorated with granulation also belong to the Dančeny-Brangstrup horizon. Recently, having reached out to amateur metal detectorists in Ukraine, K. Myzgin amassed a record of several hundred gold pendants recovered in that region; there is evidence that gold pendants of this form are equally widespread in other areas of the ‘Gothic’ territory (Map 6).

Yet another form of gold jewellery associated with the Dančeny-Brangstrup horizon are bucket pendants, interpreted by some researchers as incense containers²⁹. Each of these pendant forms has fairly good parallels in the ancient tradition and are essentially imitations of earlier forms. In the Late Roman Period there is also an observable increase in the number of gold jewellery items in Scandinavia (Map 7). At this time, eastern Zealand,

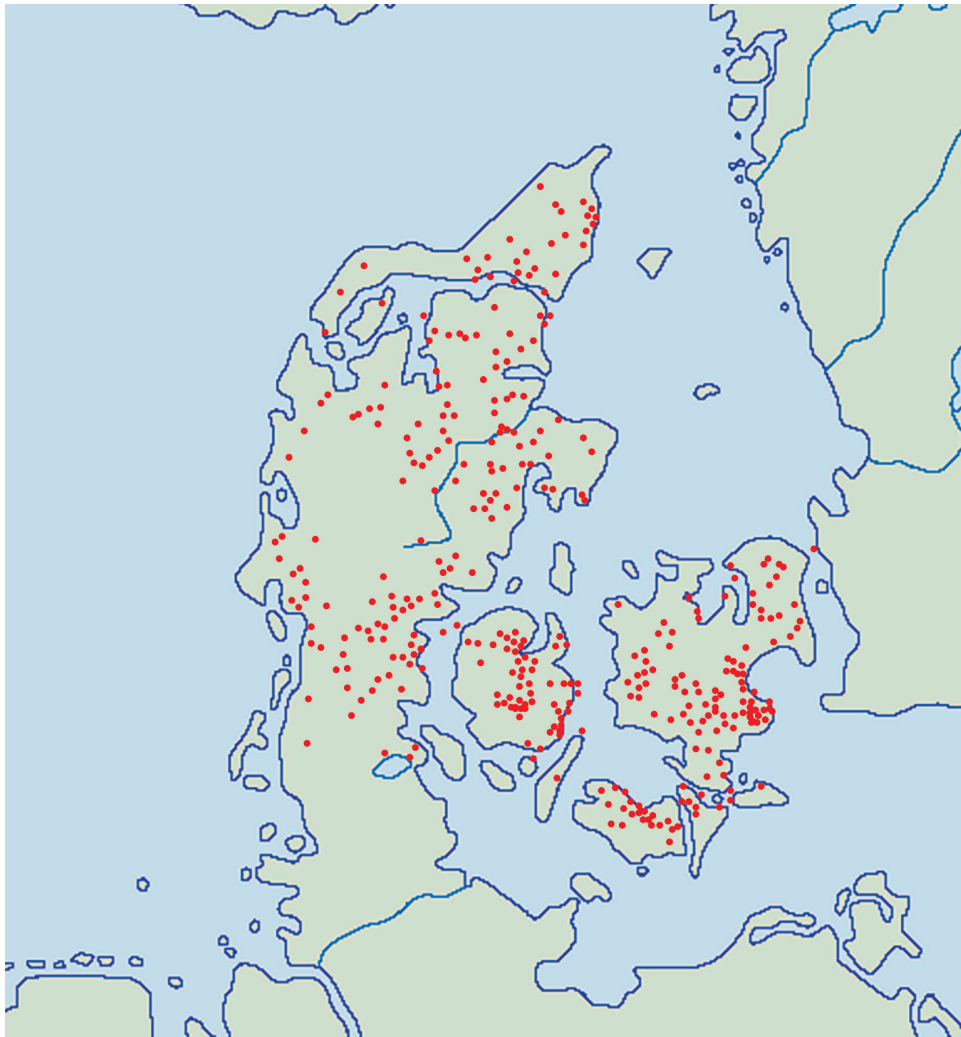
the sites Gudme on Funen and Sorte Muld on Bornholm emerge as the main emporia importing gold³⁰.

The increase in the number of gold finds noted starting from the late 3rd century is paralleled by a significant decrease in Roman gold coin finds. As mentioned earlier, this suggests that barbarians preferred to convert coins into jewellery. Another new development during this period is an apparent change in the function of gold coins suggested by a new practice of providing gold coins with a decorative loop for suspension. These coins are dated in general to the last quarter of the 3rd century or early 4th century and were present for example, in the Brangstrup hoard.

In our opinion, this group of coins proves that by the late 3rd century and the first half of the 4th century, the function of gold coins in barbarian societies had changed

²⁹ Bărcă 2021.

³⁰ Watt 1991; Watt 2006; Grimm 2004; Pesch 2011b; Sørensen 2022.



Map 7 The distribution of gold hoards in Denmark in the Late Roman Iron Age.

dramatically: from symbols of affiliation to male military elites they had evolved into prestige objects mostly worn by women. This shift could be the reflection of change in Roman-barbarian relations, particularly during the reign of Constantine the Great (especially after the treaty of AD 332). The very political and ideological basis of Roman gold had changed: from a symbol of the defeat of Rome — no longer necessary during this age — gold had become a symbol of friendly relations with the Romans or, had even, in the case of gold jewellery, become part and parcel of the adoption by barbarian elites of the Roman luxurious lifestyle.

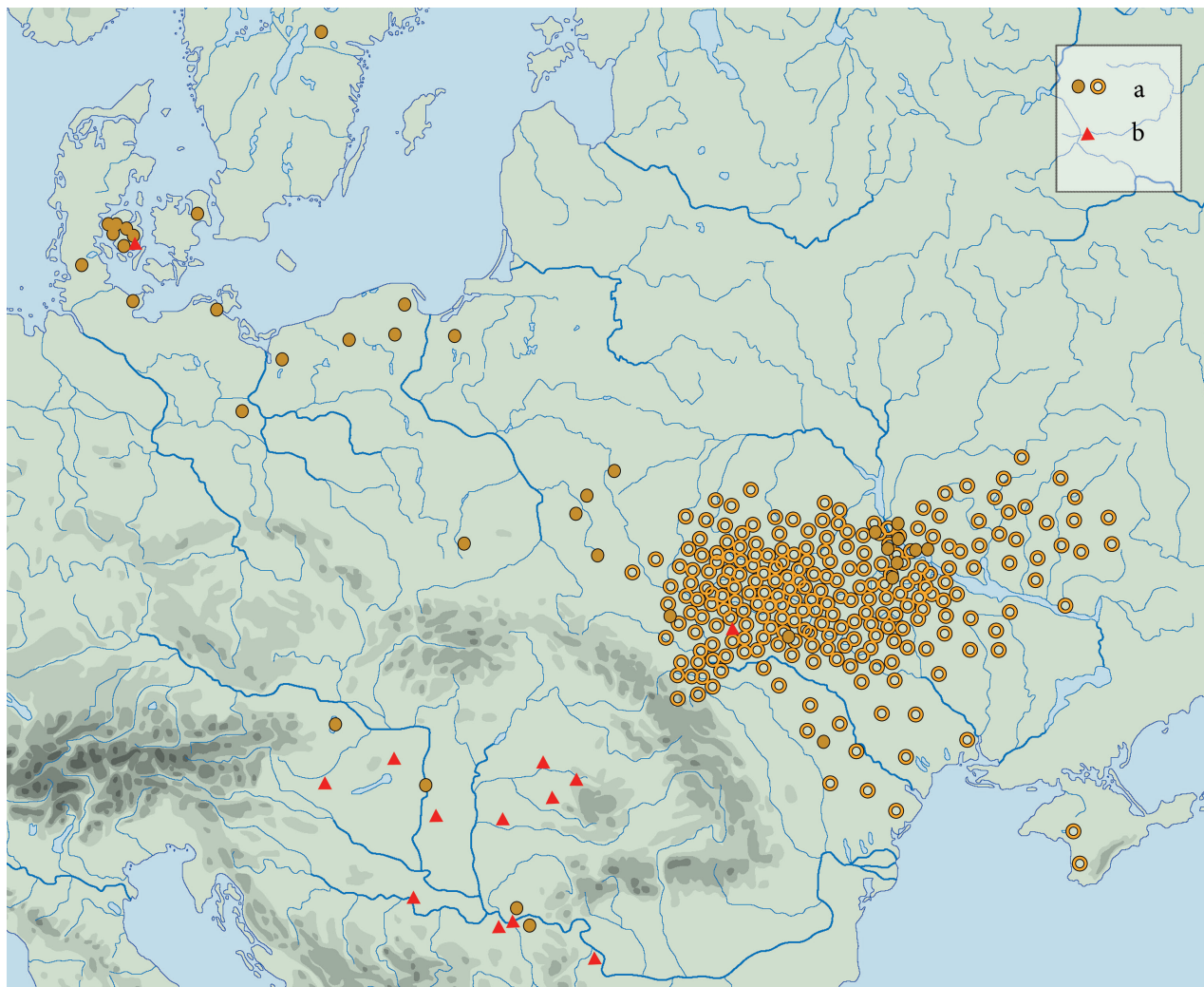
Perhaps the internal economic factors had also changed both the nature of the elites themselves and method of their identification through symbolic items, a point that is largely overlooked by researchers³¹. One of the factors was the transfer of the ‘know-how’ from

the classical world (e.g. agriculture, pottery, goldwork). Another was the use of natural resources. For example, the societies of the Chernyakhiv culture apparently experienced an upsurge in their development after moving into a region of rich black chernozem soils. Surplus harvests would have supported not only the development of crafts production, but also the emergence of a solid middle class. It is a reasonable guess that its members aspired to a social status and stability previously reserved for the military elite, and this brought about the change in the role of gold within the barbarian societies of eastern Europe. Perhaps the new fashion for looped rather than pierced Roman gold coins is a manifestation of this process³².

When the supply of original Roman *aurei* dwindled in the late 3rd century, the barbarians started making their imitations. The distribution map of barbarian gold

31 cf. Quast 2021.

32 Myzgin 2015.



Map 8 The distribution of gold imitations of Roman coins: a – Chernyakhiv (eastern European) group, b – Danube group; filled figures – finds with precise localization; empty figures – sites with approximate localization.

coins shows that there were two main groups: an earlier, eastern European one (the main concentration) and a chronologically later group recorded on the Danube. The first gold imitative coins were apparently manufactured in the second half of the 3rd century in western Ukraine, on Gothic territory³³. Their production continued on the middle Danube well into the 4th century (Map 8). The function of these gold and gold-plated imitations is as yet unclear, partly because only a handful of them were recorded in an archaeological context. We think that the earliest of the barbarian imitative coins could have been used in the same way as the original *aurei* of Decius, as prestige objects reserved for the military elite. And, like their Roman gold prototypes, with time they evolved into ornaments. This is suggested by the percentage of

imitative coins provided with loops. Most of them are gold imitations of issues from the period of the Tetrarchy and Constantinian emperors³⁴.

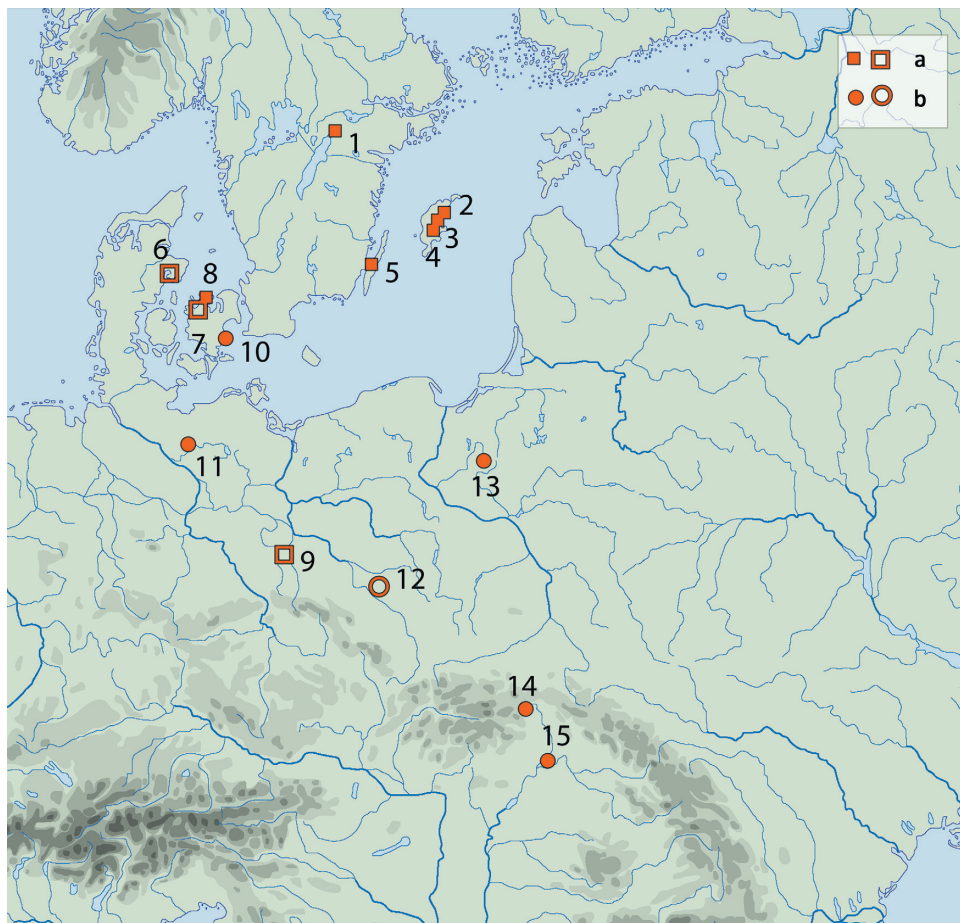
From the early 4th century onwards, during the Constantinian period we observe a significant shift in the symbolic role of gold within barbarian societies, intimating their profound transformation. Chieftdom communities, where the primary role was played by war retinues (*comitatus*), were gradually being replaced by a more stratified society with a separate, strong and long-lasting political power³⁵.

This transition is reflected in eastern Europe by grave finds dated to the Late Roman Period. While in the second half of the 3rd century gold objects were found mostly in

33 Bursche – Myzgin 2017.

34 Więcek – Myzgin 2023.

35 Quast 2021.



Map 9 The distribution of the *Kolbenarmring* bracelets in the *Barbaricum* dated to the 3rd c. 1 – Luggavi; 2 – Vätåker; 3 – Bolarve; 4 – Asarve; 5 – Kleva; 6 – Bendstrup; 7 – Tømmerup; 8 – Havnsø; 9 – Cottbus; 10 – Himlingeje; 11 – Grabow; 12 – Zakrzów; 13 – Pielgrzymowo; 14 – Ostrovany; 15 – Cejkow; a – finds in hoards; b – grave finds; filled figures – single finds; empty figures – several finds.

burials of the military elite, from the beginning of the 4th century onwards, gold objects (mostly jewellery or dress objects) are found in women's or children's burials³⁶.

The most spectacular symbol of the political elite of that age must be the *Kolbenarmring* bracelets, Roman medallions, and their barbarian imitations. While the first solid gold bracelets with thickened terminals date to the 3rd century (Map 9) their symbolic role may be seen to change dramatically over time. This is evidenced by a substantial increase in their weight and change of archaeological context. We have evidence that *Kolbenarmringe* were mostly worn on the right wrist, that is, on the sword arm³⁷.

Considering that Roman gold medallions were special gifts of Roman diplomacy, offered to barbarian leaders by the emperor or his deputies, or alternately, as *donativa*, their ownership was a mark of elevated status within barbarian society. This explains why most medal-

lions known to us have an elaborate, decorative frame and loop: they are prestige objects worn to communicate their owner's superior status and connection to the Roman elites, most notably — the emperor himself. This explanation of is confirmed by the archaeological context — Roman medallions have been recorded, together with other luxury items, in hoards apparently amassed over several generations and interpreted as ancestral treasures³⁸. This role of Roman gold medallions in family treasures of the barbarian political elites, is confirmed by a reference to King Chilperic I found in Gregory of Tours' *Historia Francorum*³⁹.

The distribution map of Roman gold medallion finds apparently reflects the westward shift during the 4th century of barbarian political power centres previously established in central and western Ukraine (Map 10). This process is confirmed by the concentration of finds of gold coins and other gold objects in the areas east of the Lower Rhine⁴⁰.

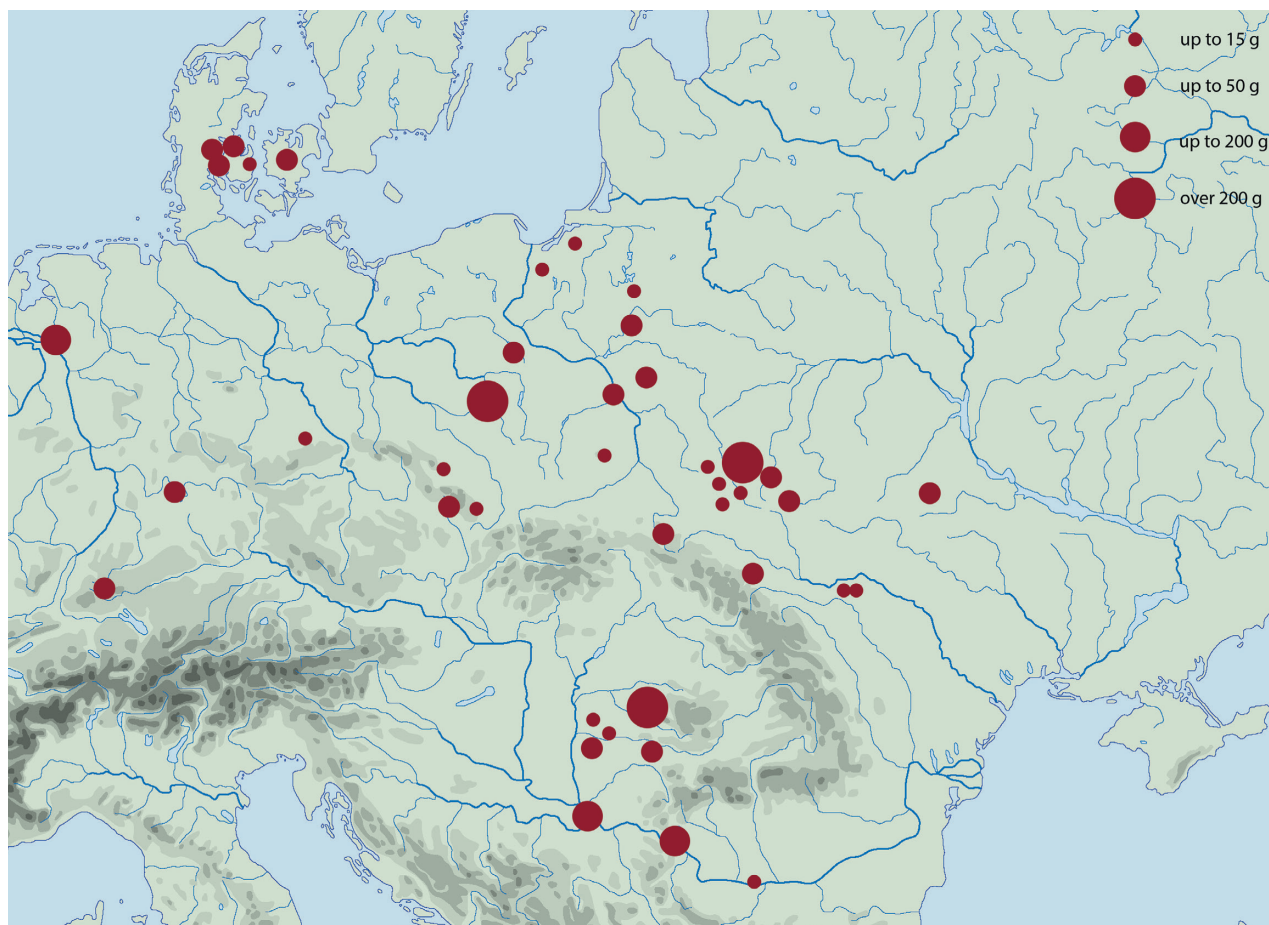
36 Gopkalo 2014.

37 Werner 1980, 14—23; Martin 1987, 218—219; Andersson 1993; Carnap-Bornheim – Ilkjær 1996, 262—265; Schmauder 1999, 107—109; Schmauder 2002, 100; Hansen 2001; Quast 2013.

38 Bursche 1998; Bursche 1999; Bursche 2000; Bursche 2001; Quast 2022.

39 Bursche 1998, 189—198.

40 Roymans 2017.



Map 10 The distribution of Roman gold medallions in the *Barbaricum*.

When in the late 4th — mid-5th century some of the Gothic communities made their way from Ukraine back to southern Scandinavia, they carried to the North not only the practice of imitating Roman coins and medallions and the technology involved, but also their symbolic meaning. The final stage in the evolution of Roman gold coins and medallions within the barbarian environment are Scandinavian gold bracteates⁴¹; like the *Guld-gubber* (gold foil figurines), another native Scandinavian form, they are not discussed here⁴². Neither is the changing role of gold in barbarian societies observed during the Hunnic period, the era of the emergence of new models of power and prestige⁴³.

Illustration credits

Fig. 1 © Museum in Łębork. Fig. 2 photo P. Dehlholm. Fig. 3 after Bursche – Myzgin 2020, 215 fig. 9. Fig. 4 after Bursche – Myzgin 2020, 217 fig. 10. Fig. 5 after Prohászka 2006, 134 pl. 14. Fig. 6 photo A. Niedźwiecki. Fig. 7 after Bursche – Niezabitowska 2018, 254 fig. 3A. Fig. 8 © The National Museum of Denmark / Anne Vibeke Leth. Map 1 after Schuster 2018, 118 fig. 54. Map 2 dataset and drawing by K. Myzgin. Map 3 after Peška – Tejral 2002, 66 fig. 36, with K. Myzgin's additions. Map 4 after Myzgin 2019, figs. 2, 10, with later additions by K. Myzgin. Map 5 after Lund Hansen – Przybyła 2010, 271 fig. 39 and Petrauskas – Syvolap 2022, 266 fig. 1. Map 6 after Skvorcov 2014, 281 fig. 5. Map 7 after Fønnesbech-Sandberg 1989, fig. 5. Map 8 after Myzgin – Vida – Więcek 2018, 229 fig. 5. Map 9 after Quast 2013, 176 fig. 5. Map 10 after Bursche – Myzgin 2013, 192, map 1, with additions by the authors

41 Axboe 1981; 1999; Axboe 2004; Pesch 2007; Pesch 2011a.

42 Lamm 2004; Watt 2008.

43 See more: Lyubichev – Myzgin 2020, 751–754.

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Abstract

The 3rd century AD was a period of major social, political and religious change in east-central Europe. Direct Roman-barbarian contacts resulted in the emergence of a new elite in Germanic societies, manifested archaeologically by the imposing burials in the Zakrzów-Sackrau horizon. The division of great quantities of goods and treasures plundered by invading barbarian retinues in the Roman provinces alongside economic development, contributed to an increasing social stratification. In the aftermath of the Roman defeat at Atritus in 251 the Goths captured the imperial treasury including a vast amount of gold. After this date, the number of gold objects found in grave inventories and hoards that can be interpreted as elite treasuries increased considerably. In addition to Roman coins and medallions and their imitations which were used as pendants, there are locally made prestige objects, symbols of power and status, such as solid gold *Kolbenarmringe* and neck-rings. This tradition within the Germanic environment can be noted in the Goth territory between the Black Sea and southern Scandinavia. Other fascinating phenomena of a religious nature are the decorative gold foil amulets and/or offerings, and crescent-shaped pendants (*lunulae*) recovered in the same area. In the 21st century, the widespread use of metal detectors, especially in Ukraine and Denmark, has led to a vast increase in archaeological finds and evidence.

Zusammenfassung

Das 3. Jahrhundert n. Chr. war im östlichen Mitteleuropa eine Zeit grosser sozialer, politischer und religiöser Veränderungen. Direkte Kontakte zwischen Römern und «Barbaren» führten zur Herausbildung einer neuen Elite in den germanischen Gesellschaften, was archäologisch durch die imposanten Gräber im Zakrzów-Sackrau-Horizont belegt ist. Die Verteilung grosser Mengen an Gütern und Reichtümern, die von eindringenden barbarischen Gruppen in den römischen Provinzen erbeutet wurden, trug neben der wirtschaftlichen Entwicklung zu einer zunehmenden sozialen Stratifizierung bei. Nach der römischen Niederlage bei Atritus im Jahr 251 erbeuteten die Goten den kaiserlichen Schatz, darunter eine grosse Menge Gold. Danach stieg die Zahl der Goldobjekte in Gräbern und Horten, die als Besitz der Eliten gedeutet werden können, erheblich an. Neben römischen Münzen und Medaillons und deren Imitationen, die als Anhänger verwendet wurden, gibt es lokal hergestellte Prestigeobjekte — Symbole von Macht und Status — wie Kolben-

armringe und Halsringe aus massivem Gold. Innerhalb des germanischen Umfelds lässt sich diese Tradition im Gebiet der Goten zwischen dem Schwarzen Meer und Südkandinavien nachweisen. Beispiele mit religiösem Hintergrund sind die dekorativen Amulette und/oder Opfergaben aus Goldfolie sowie halbmondförmige Anhänger (*lunulae*), die in demselben Gebiet gefunden wurden. Im 21. Jahrhundert hat der insbesondere in der Ukraine und in Dänemark weit verbreitete Einsatz von Metalldetektoren zu einer enormen Zunahme archäologischer Funde und Zeugnisse geführt.

Aleksander Bursche

Department of Numismatics and Museology
Faculty of Archaeology, University of Warsaw
Krakowskie Przedmieście 26/28
PL-00-927 Warszawa
abursche@uw.edu.pl

Kyrylo Myzgin

Department of Numismatics and Museology
Faculty of Archaeology, University of Warsaw
Krakowskie Przedmieście 26/28
PL-00-927 Warszawa
k.myzgin@uw.edu.pl