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## FOUR-LEAVED FITTINGS OF NORTHERN SAMBIA (10<sup>th</sup>-11<sup>th</sup> CENTURIES)\*

Abstract:

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Judging by data from funeral contexts, the belt fittings of war horse harness of the 10<sup>th</sup> century Prussian combatants in Northern Sambia bore four-leaved ornaments or fittings. This motif can be traced back to Magyar and Old Rus' examples. In the first half of the 11<sup>th</sup> century conical helmets with gilded surfaces appear in Kievan Rus' and the Balts. These helmets were not widely worn but were most likely restricted to wealthier individuals. The sides of these helmets are decorated with rhombic fittings which derive from Prussian horse harness. Fittings of analogous forms appear on the top parts of helmets which are traditionally related to workshops of the Golden Horde. The course of development of four-leaved fittings in the Baltic territories and in Eastern Europe of the 10<sup>th</sup>-13<sup>th</sup> centuries reflect complex paths of formation within the local military retinue culture.

Key words: Viking Period, Prussians, horse harness, armament, four-leaved fittings

The material culture of Prussian warriors of the northern part of the Sambian Peninsula (at present – the Zelenogradsk District of the Kaliningrad Region) in the second quarter of the 11<sup>th</sup> century is remarkable for the presence of silver-plated bronze horse headgear fittings (Кулаков 2003, 318). These finds are classified in the Prussian archaeological records as being 'large' (3 x 3 cm), as opposed to 'small' (1 x 1 cm) square-shaped fittings, decorated with the figure of a braided cross of with pseudo-pearl ornament (Кулаков 1990a, 37). Despite the first 'large' fittings having already been found at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Gaerte 1929, Abb. 280b), the origin of these artefacts, which are quite characteristic for Sambian culture is not completely clear. It was only once these finds attracted the attention of a Prussian archaeologist of the pre-World War II period, who assumed that they were made from bronze (silver plating on these artefacts was irretrievably lost in result of outdated conservation methods which were in use at that time) and they were related them to the pre-Teutonic period (German – 'die spätheidische Zeit') (La Baume 1944, 19, Abb. 37). It was in July 1977 in the course of works by the Baltic expedition of the Institute of Archaeology of the USSR Academy of Sciences at the burial ground

of Yrzekapinis/Клинцовка-1 that 'large' fittings were first (re)discovered in the early post-World War II period. Fortunately advances in conservation techniques meant that it was possible to fully preserve their silver plating. Almost three decades ago I defined an Old Magyar provenance for the figure of the, which ornaments the silver foil of these 'large' finds (Кулаков 1990a, 37). As such, it is now possible to discuss the stages of development of this ornamental motif in the Balts territories and in Eastern Europe.

In the archaeological material of the Merovingian Period (the 6<sup>th</sup>-7<sup>th</sup> centuries) there is a great number horse harness finds. Among them, various kinds of war horse headgear strap distributors (German – 'Riemenverteilern', 'Vierpaß') are known. What is common for all these artefacts is their cross-shaped form, which developed from the quatrefoil strap distributors of the Hunnic Period in 4<sup>th</sup>-5<sup>th</sup> centuries (Кулаков 2016a, 41). Among the archaeological finds from the Merovingian Period in Germany there is a 3.5 x 3.5 cm cross-shaped iron quatrefoil strap distributor – stray find from Staffelberg (Fig. 1:1). Analogously to numerous other details of material culture, this very simple form of quatrefoil strap distributors was imitated by Scandinavian artisans of the Viking Period.

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\* Editorial board does not share all Author's thesis.

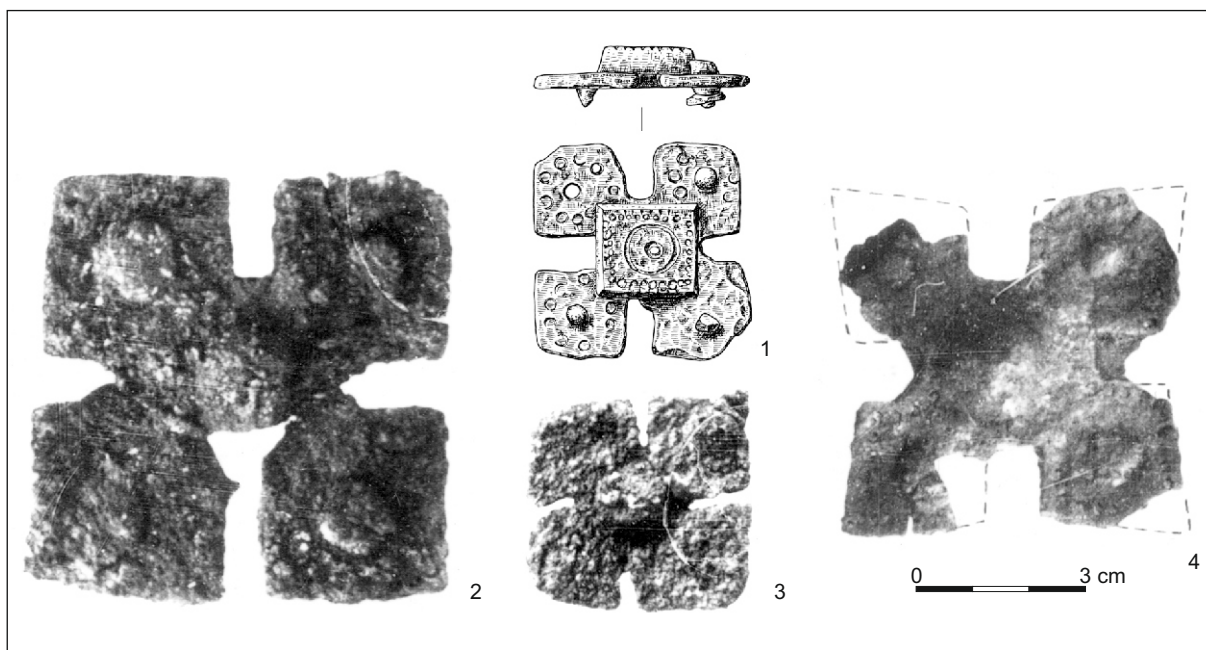


Fig. 1. Square-shaped fittings of horse headgear from barrows of the 7<sup>th</sup>-10<sup>th</sup> centuries: 1 – Staffelberg, stray find (Bavaria, Germany); 2 – Birka, Barrow Bj-944 (iron); 3 – Birka, Barrow Bj-965 (iron); 4 – Birka, Barrow Bj-955 (iron), the 10<sup>th</sup> century (1 – after *Oexle 1992, Taf. 114, 252*; 2-4 – after *Arbman 1940, Taf. 23-25*).

Ryc. 1. Kwadratowe okucia ogłowia końskiego pochodzące z kurhanów datowanych na VII-X w.: 1 – Staffelberg, znalezisko przypadkowe (Bawaria, Niemcy); 2 – Birka, kurhan Bj-944 (żelazo); 3 – Birka, kurhan Bj-965 (żelazo); 4 – Birka, kurhan Bj-955 (żelazo), X w. (1 – wg *Oexle 1992, Taf. 114, 252*; 2-4 – wg *Arbman 1940, Taf. 23-25*).

However, in Northern Europe such artefacts were not used as fastenings for crossed thongs (in order to increase the strength of the distributor, a boss was placed in its centre), but as fittings on horse harness thongs. In the 10<sup>th</sup> century Scandinavia one can see a spread of iron fittings, which have a square shaped form. Their sizes vary between 3 x 3 cm and 7 x 7 cm (Fig. 1:2-4). Due to the presence of narrow slits (to be more exact – kerfs) which were placed in a crosswise manner, these fittings looked like crosses with blade-shaped arms. In the centres of these arms there were round openings, through which fittings were attached to thongs with the use of iron rivets. Given the fact that such fittings were easy to produce, they became quite popular among Scandinavian artisans.

In Sambia, iron cross-like fittings with square-shaped arms arrive from Scandinavian not later than the mid-10<sup>th</sup> century (Кулаков 1999, 247). On some Sambian fittings there are even imitations of central bosses (Fig. 2:1,3-4). On the other hand, Sambian artisans reduced the size of these fittings to 1 x 1 cm, and at the end of the 10<sup>th</sup> century. The side notches transform from being right-angled to triangular (Fig. 2:3-4). Together with iron fittings

from burial Y-118 of the Yrzekapinis/Клинецовка-1 (Zelenogradsk District) burial ground, the first silver fittings in the shape of the cross fleury (in the Orthodox tradition the cross with exaggerated arms is considered to be of Greek provenance) (Fig. 2:2) are dated to the 10<sup>th</sup> century (*ibid.*, 255).<sup>1</sup> In burial 41 of the Schulstein/Вольное (Zelenogradsk District) burial ground there is a bronze blade-shaped fitting. Its size is 1.5 x 1.5 cm and on its sides there are round openings instead of right-angled kerfs (Fig. 2:5). This fitting was considered to be a quatrefoil strap distributor. Two fragments of horse headgear survived. On their ends there were fittings with an image of a linear trident, which was embossed from inside. Virtually the same image can be seen on the shield-like pendants of the horse headgear from burial Y-83 in Yrzekapinis/Клинецовка-1. This headgear was provided with iron cross-like fittings (end of the 10<sup>th</sup> century) (*ibid.*, 245). The assemblage of non-ornamented fittings in Sambia ends with the fitting from burial 41 of the Schulstein/Вольное burial ground.

The line of development of square-shaped fittings of horse headgear thongs in South-Eastern Balts area is continued by 'large' fittings with a symmetrical ornamental composition in the

<sup>1</sup> On the basis of accompanying finds the burial can be dated to the mid-10<sup>th</sup> century.

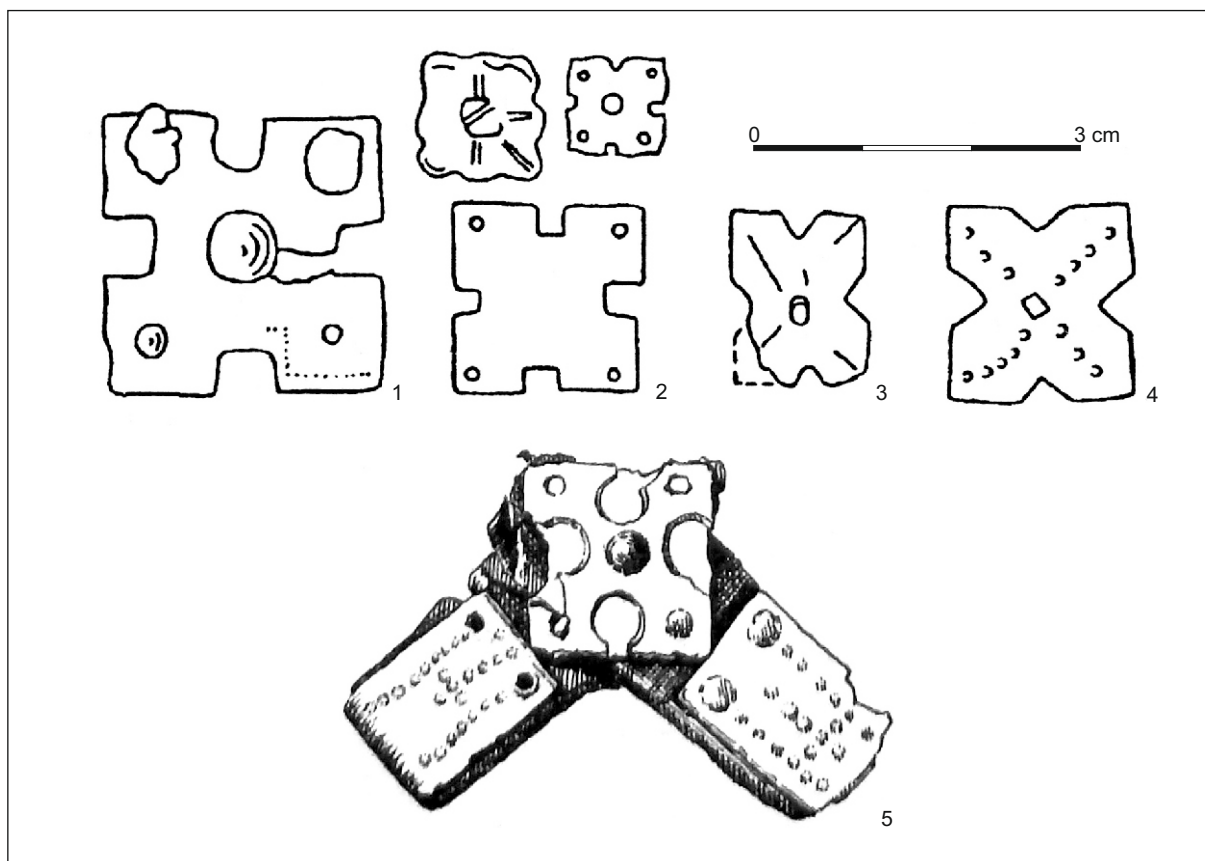


Fig. 2. Square-shaped fittings of horse headgear of Northern Sambia: 1 – Yrzekapinis/Клинцовка-1, Burial Y-91 (iron); 2 – Yrzekapinis/Клинцовка-1, Burial Y-118 (iron and silver); 3 – Yrzekapinis/Клинцовка-1, Burial Y-130 (iron); 4 – Yrzekapinis/Клинцовка-1, Burial Y-83 (iron); 5 – Bludau-II/Кострово, Burial 41 (iron and leather) (1-4 – after Кулаков 1992, *рис. 1*; 5 – after Bezzemberger 1914, *Abb. 83*).

Рис. 2. Квадратowe okucia ogłowia końskiego pochodzące z północnej Sambii: 1 – Yrzekapinis/Клинцовка-1, курхан Y-91 (żelazo); 2 – Yrzekapinis/Клинцовка-1, курхан Y-118 (żelazo i srebro); 3 – Yrzekapinis/Клинцовка-1, курхан Y-130 (żelazo); 4 – Yrzekapinis/Клинцовка-1, курхан Y-83 (żelazo); 5 – Bludau-II/Кострово, курхан 41 (żelazo i skóra) (1-4 – wg Кулаков 1992, *рис. 1*; 5 – wg Bezzemberger 1914, *Abb. 83*).

form of the four leaves (Fig. 3:2-9). Among the archaeological finds from Eastern Europe this design first emerges on the decorative silver silver auroch horn fittings from the barrow in 'Chernaya mogila' (Chernigov, Ukraine). On the basis of a J. Petersen Type V sword, the barrow is dated to the first half of the 10<sup>th</sup> century (Рыбаков 1949, 39). A simplified version of this design can be seen on the silver-gilt square-shaped jerkin fasteners (?) from the barrow in the Gul'bishche sacred site (10<sup>th</sup> century) (Fig. 3:1). With regard to their measurements and ornamental compositions, all these artefacts can be traced down to Magyar-fittings, which were distributed in Scandinavia and Rus' in the apogee of the Viking Period (Jansson 1989, 612, *Abb. 24*).

These four-leaved fittings were part of the equipment of high-ranking Old Russian warriors. A comparative analysis of the antiquities of the warriors of old Russian society and their grave goods demonstrates that there were firm links between Russian and Prussian warrior communities,

which were established in the second half of the 10<sup>th</sup> century (Кулаков 1990b, 114, 115). As a result of these links, Prussian warriors after their service in the retinues of the Dukes of Kiev (which is directly testified to by numerous finds of Old Russian provenance which are known from Sambia – Кулаков 1987, 120) may have carried patterns or some artefacts for manufacture of fittings in the form of the four-leaved cross back home. R. Shiroukhov, who has recently published a paper on old-Russian imports to the Prussian lands, is mentioning – following author's hypothesis – four-leaved fittings of Yrzekapinis/Клинцовка-1 burial as a link connecting the Prussian and Rus' troops (Широухов 2014, 401).

During the late 10<sup>th</sup> and early 11<sup>th</sup> centuries in the northern part of the Sambian Peninsula a variant of silver-plated bronze fittings became widespread among local warriors (Кулаков 1987, 120). Such fittings were ornamented with pseudo-pearl images of the four-leaved cross (Fig. 3:2). Analogously to many other types of silver-plated

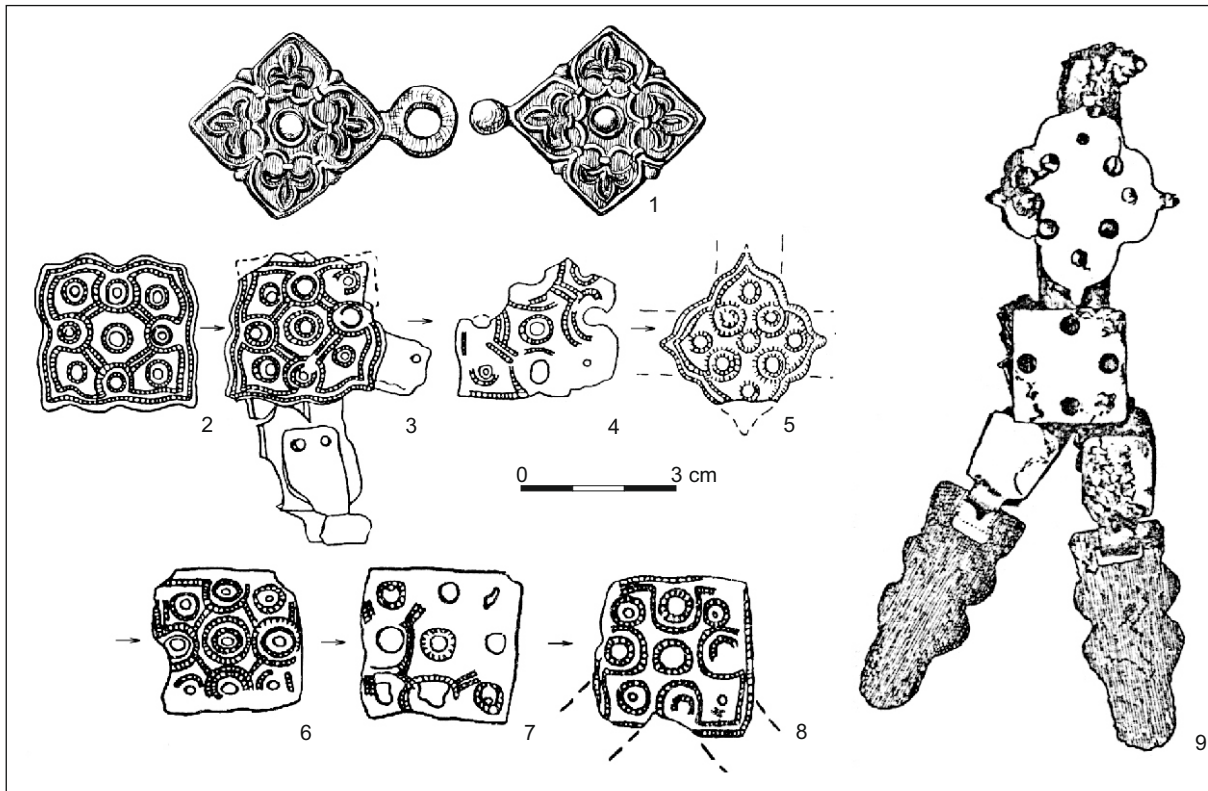


Fig. 3. Four-leaved fittings of horse headgear of Old Rus' and Northern Sambia: 1 – Chernigov, Gul'bishche Barrow, Ukraine (bronze); 2 – Yrzekapinis/Клищовка-1, Burial Y-10 (bronze, silver-plated); 3 – Yrzekapinis/Клищовка-1, Burial Y-39 (bronze, silver-plated); 4 – Yrzekapinis/Клищовка-1, Burial Y-4 (bronze, silver-plated); 5 – Yrzekapinis/Клищовка-1, Burial Y-136 (bronze, silver-plated); 6 – Yrzekapinis/Клищовка-1, Burial Y-56 (bronze, silver-plated); 7 – Yrzekapinis/Клищовка-1, Burial Y-65 (bronze, silver-plated); 8 – Yrzekapinis/Клищовка-1, Burial Y-42 (bronze, silver-plated); 9 – Schulstein/Вольное, burial with no number (bronze and leather) (1 – after Рыбаков 1949, *pus.* 13; 2-8 – after Кулаков 1992, *pus.* 2; 9 – after Gaerte 1929, *Abb.* 280:b).

Рис. 3. Czterolistne okucia ogłowia końskiego z Rusi i północnej Sambi: 1 – Czernichów, kurhan Gul'bišče, Ukraina (brąz); 2 – Yrzekapinis/Клищовка-1, kurhan Y-10 (brąz platerowany srebrem); 3 – Yrzekapinis/Клищовка-1, kurhan Y-39 (brąz platerowany srebrem); 4 – Yrzekapinis/Клищовка-1, kurhan Y-4 (brąz platerowany srebrem); 5 – Yrzekapinis/Клищовка-1, kurhan Y-136 (brąz platerowany srebrem); 6 – Yrzekapinis/Клищовка-1, kurhan Y-56 (brąz platerowany srebrem); 7 – Yrzekapinis/Клищовка-1, kurhan Y-65 (brąz platerowany srebrem); 8 – Yrzekapinis/Клищовка-1, Burial Y-42 (brąz platerowany srebrem); 9 – Schulstein/Вольное, kurhan bez numeru (brąz i skóra) (1 – wg Рыбаков 1949, *pus.* 13; 2-8 – wg Кулаков 1992, *pus.* 2; 9 – wg Gaerte 1929, *Abb.* 280:b).

fittings, four-leaved fittings were covered with silver foil, and had ornamentation of pseudo-granulated figures embossed on them with the use of a die. Quite frequently, solid fittings or even fibulae were used as such dies (Кулаков, Калашников 2002, 39), though it only 'large' and 'small' fittings were bronze-based. Other types of fittings, which were fastened to Prussian harness thongs in the second half of the 10<sup>th</sup> century (that is, before the appearance of four-leaved fittings), were manufactured by means of casting a metal of low-melting point onto the internal side of the silver foil, which had been embossed on a die. Prototypes of these ornamental designs come from Scandinavia and are also *dispersed in Eastern Europe from Southern Hungary to Povolzhye* (Volga region) (*ibid.*, 48).

Four-leaved fittings were close to iron fittings with regard to their sizes. Analogously to their

iron forerunners, they densely covered the thongs of the horse's headgear in addition to its reins. All Prussian fittings were attached to thongs which were made from thin leather of grey or black colour, which was confirmed archeologically, folded in two along its long axis. This design of the thong, which was stitched from inside with a thin strap or simply with a textile thread, made it more elastic and strong at the same time. Fittings which were filled with low-melting tin or lead from inside, as well as 'small' fittings, were attached to the thong with the use of bronze clamps of Type Staeppler. This method of ornamented horse headgears attachment demonstrates their purely ceremonial significance. 'Large' fittings were attached to thongs with the use of bronze rivets. To accommodate these rivets, round openings were made in the bronze base in the corners of four-leaved fittings. Early variants of fittings

could be attached to the horse's headgear straps both on the external and internal side, which seems to be a unique phenomenon in European archaeology. At the end of the 10<sup>th</sup> and the beginning of the 11<sup>th</sup> century fittings were arranged on thongs in the shape of squares, close to each other. Therefore, it becomes evident that a mistake was made by R. Shirouhov, who called the arrangement of these fittings on the thongs 'rhombic' (Широухов 2014, 401).

On the basis of the analysis of the accompanying grave goods it was possible to arrange the fittings from graves in the burial ground of Yrzekapinis/Клинцовка-1 in chronological order according to their development (Fig. 3:2-8). Unfortunately, the fittings from other graves assemblages of Prussian warriors have not survived due to the excavation methods, used by German archaeologists in the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. Fittings from burial Y-10 (first series) are the closest to their Old Rus' prototypes (Fig. 3:1). They are ornamented with four-leaved figures, the ends of which are in the shape of exaggerated petals. The sides of these fittings have a wave-shaped form (Fig. 3:2). The attention paid by Prussian artisans to the details of their work may be taken as an indicator of the significance of these fittings. It should be said that images of the equal-armed cross had an important protective meaning in traditional art of Early Medieval Europe (Кулаков, Валуев 2001, 20, 21). Around the mid-11<sup>th</sup> century Four-leaved fittings become cruder in Yrzekapinis. On fittings from the second (Fig. 3:5) and especially from the third (Fig. 3:6-8) series crossing lines disappear and the form of the fitting becomes square-shaped. In general, this is part of the overall simplification of grave assemblages (Кулаков 1992, 141). Apart from the burial ground of Yrzekapinis/Клинцовка-1, where works of two or three artisans were found (they lived in the neighbouring settlement of Wargenau-Малиновка, see *ibid.*, 142), four-leaved fittings were encountered in the burials grounds of Veršvai (Kaunas District in Lithuania) (*ibid.*, Fig. 3:п) and Schulstein/Вольное (Zelenogradsk District). There, both an early and a late (square-shaped) version of 'large' fittings were found on one thong (Fig. 3:9). A later modification of a 'large' fitting can be seen in burial Y-42, which can be dated to the mid-11<sup>th</sup> century (Fig. 3:8; Кулаков 1999, 232). In 2009, during excavations at the burial ground of Kleine Kaup/Малый Кауп (Zelenogradsk District), a bronze rectangular fitting in the shape of the four-leaved cross was found in a Prussian male cremation burial K-28 (10<sup>th</sup> century). Its size is 5.5 x 4.5 cm (Кулаков 2016b, 50, Fig. 18). After the end of the

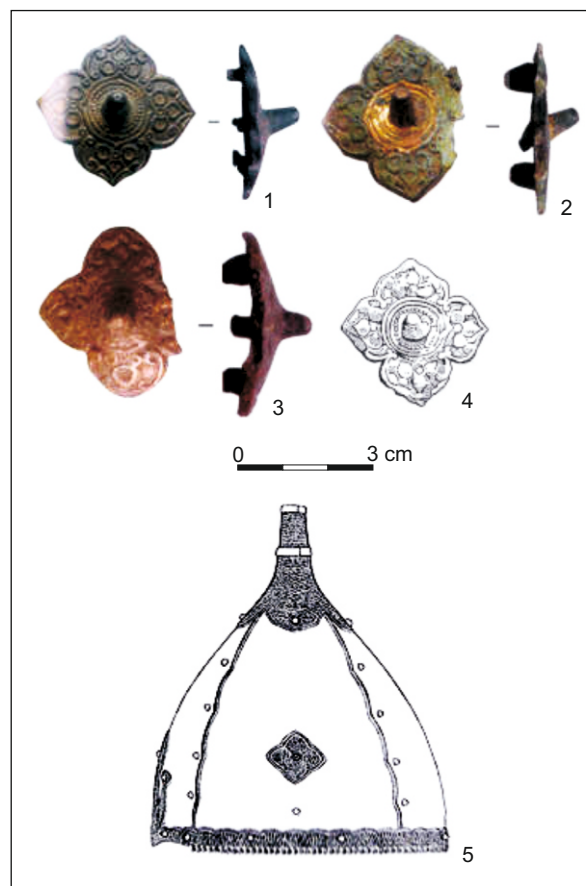


Fig. 4. Four-leaved plates of the helmets: 1 – Cimlyanskaya; 2 – Sarkel (private collection) (gilded bronze); 3 – reconstruction of a helmet from the barrow in the 'Chernaya mogila' (1-2 – after Кирпичников 2009, рис. 35:А, 36; 3 – after Барышев, Коровкин 2009, рис. 46).

Рис. 4. Czterolistne okucia helmów: 1 – Cimlânskaâ; 2 – Sarkel (kolekcja prywatna) (złocony brąz); 3 – rekonstrukcja helmu z „Czarnej Mogiły” (1-2 – wg Кирпичников 2009, рис. 35:А, 36; 3 – wg Барышев, Коровкин 2009, рис. 46).

Viking Age this motif in the ornamental art of the West Balts can only be found on silver pendants (possibly imported from Russia?) in the hoard from Skomenten/Skomazko in the territory of the Sudovians/Yotvingians (Gaerte 1929, Abb. 288).

In the first half of the 11<sup>th</sup> century in Sambia one can see the appearance of pointed helmets, covered with gilded plates (Кулаков 1990a, 81), which most likely indicates that such helmets were not fighting armament, but rather artefacts which identified a high social status of their owners. Already half a century ago Lithuanian archaeologist R. Volkaitė-Kulikauskienė proposed a theory on the Old Russian provenance of these helmets (Волкайте-Куликаускене 1968, 481). At present, this assumption is generally accepted (Кирпичников 2009, 5-11). The use of such helmets by high-class members of Prussian military retinues (for example burial 12 in the cemetery of Ekritten/Ветрово-3 – Кулаков 1989, 43) in the



Fig. 5. Four-leaved top parts of helmets: 1 – Engels; 2 – Novy Saraj; 3 – Novoterskoye (gilded bronze) (after *Негин 2012, рис. 17:2-4*).

Ryc. 5. Czterolitsne górne okucia hełmów: 1 – Engels; 2 – Nowy Saraj; 3 – Novoterskoe (złocony brąz) (wg *Негин 2012, рис. 17:2-4*).

early 11<sup>th</sup> century coincided with the spread of four-leaved fittings of the first series in the military milieu in Sambia (see above). What is noteworthy is the fact that four-leaved fittings of the size of 2.5 x 2.5 cm were fastened to the sides of gilded helmets. These fittings were ornamented with images of the leaf-shaped cross, which, as we have seen, is similar to fittings of horse headgear thongs of the first series (Fig. 4:1-4). Fittings, which decorated luxurious helmets and found in Russia, Poland and Khazar Khaganate in the second half of the 10<sup>th</sup> century were cast from some ‘copper-based alloy’ (Кайнов 2016, 130). The fittings were arranged in a rhombus-like manner and were fastened in pairs on the sides of the helmets. Furthermore, analogously to the aurochs horns from ‘Chernaya mogila’, they ornamented what would otherwise be a significantly large empty surface on the piece (Fig. 4:5). These fittings were cast from bronze – as it was the case with ‘large’ fittings of Prussian horse headgear – in open one-sided moulds and were attached to helmets with the use of rivets, which were cast in the same mould. In the centre of the helmet fittings there is a roughly 1 cm long conical projection. Fittings of gilded helmets, though not open-work, which was the case for ‘large’ Sambian ones, retained similarities in the general shape, details of construction and decoration to the Sambian finds. Other similarities included their construction and ornamental composition, which was convergent to that of Sambian finds. With a necessary degree of caution it can be proposed that both variants of the these fittings shared a common prototype, which was manufactured by an Old Russian artisans (similarly to fasteners from the barrow in Gul’bishche).

In mid 13<sup>th</sup> century Old Rus’, at a time when the region suffered from the Tartar-Mongol invasion, Golden Horde spherical-conical ‘steep-sided’ helmets with gilded surfaces appear. Their finials are fixed with four-petal clips (Негин 2012, 55, 78). In this case, opinion is that these sockets (Fig. 5) appeared earlier than helmets of this type (ibid., 56). We cannot disagree with this point because these ‘top parts’ are quite close to earlier four-leaved fittings of Prussian horse headgear and of Old Rus’ gilded parade helmets both with regard to their provenance and dimensions. This statement does not support the opinion of the exclusively Golden Horde provenance of ‘steep-sided’ helmets of the 13<sup>th</sup>-14<sup>th</sup> centuries. Furthermore, it allows to assume that Eastern European artisans took part in the creation of such helmets. It can be tentatively proposed that there was a line of continuity between Old Rus’ gilded helmets of the 11<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> centuries and ‘steep-sided’ (also gilded in numerous cases) Eastern European helmets of the 13<sup>th</sup>-14<sup>th</sup> centuries. The course of development of four-leaved fittings in the Balt territories and in Eastern Europe of the 10<sup>th</sup>-13<sup>th</sup> centuries reflect complex paths of formation of the local military retinue culture.

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## CZTEROLISTNE OKUCIA Z PÓŁNOCNEJ SAMBII (X-XI WIEK)

### Streszczenie

Jak wskazuje datowanie cmentarzysk, w X stuleciu na terenie północnej Sambii wśród elementów rzędu końskiego pojawiają się okucia rzemieni zdobione ornamentem w kształcie krzyża o ramionach przypominających płatki kwiatowe. Motyw ten powstaje w kręgach madziarskim i staroruskim. W pierwszej połowie XI stulecia na terenie Rusi Kijowskiej i wśród Bałtów upowszechniają się poślacane, stożkowe hełmy – atrybut dowódców drużyn książęcych. Boczne

powierzchnie tych hełmów zdobią romboidalne okucia, genetycznie związane z okuciami rzędów końskich pruskich drużynników. Podobne okucia, tyle że zdobiące szczytowe partie hełmów, pojawiają się też na zabytkach wiązanych tradycyjnie z warsztatami lokowanymi na terenie Złotej Ordy. Rozprzestrzenienie liliowatych okuc na terenach zajmowanych przez Bałtów i w Europie Wschodniej w X-XIII w. ukazuje złożoną problematykę formowania się miejscowej kultury drużynniczej.