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A MYSTERIOUS BROOCH FROM THE SOUTHERN OUTSKIRTS OF MASURIA

ABSTRACT

The cemetery at Chochół (former *Friedrichsfelde*, Kr. *Ortelsburg*), located at the southern edge of Masuria, was discovered and excavated in the early 19th century. The results have not been published, and the material was lost during World War II. The only sources of information on the cemetery are archival records. On this basis, it can be established that the Chochół site yielded a unique crossbow tendril brooch with a double spring. Although various brooches with two or three springs appeared in the Late Roman Period throughout central

European *Barbaricum*, tendril brooches of this design were very rare: they were represented only by isolated specimens from Przeworsk and Wielbark Cultures, and the West Balt Circle. The small number and wide dispersion of finds make the emergence of crossbow tendril-brooches with a double spring seem to be the result of experiments undertaken independently of each other by local craftsmen. This interpretation also seems correct in the case of the Chochół find.

Keywords: East Prussia; Late Roman Period; Bogaczewo Culture, West Balts

The question of the time and manner of the arrival of the Slavs in the Vistula River basin is one of the most exciting research problems of Polish prehistoric archaeology. Of special significance for the discussion on this subject are the earliest Slavic sites from Mazovia and Podlachia, the scarce early cemeteries in particular.¹ Equally important is the borderline between the Slavic settlement of northern Mazovia and the Balts of East Prussia. During the Late Migration Period and the Early Middle Ages, the border area was a wide, empty strip of land, whose settlement began at the end of the 1st millennium AD and did not end until the 16th century.² In this situation, any archaeological sites located within this border zone are of particular interest, including those that are dated to the first centuries AD.

One such site is Chochół,³ a village in the southern outskirts of Masuria, near the border of former

East Prussia⁴ (Fig. 1). The first discoveries at the site date to as early as the beginning of the 19th century, when, according to laconic reports, a cremation burial ground was found.⁵ Based on rather enigmatic mentions of the finds, the cemetery can be dated to the Roman Period (1st – 4th century AD) and associated with the so-called Bogaczewo Culture, whose territory at that time covered almost the entire Masurian Lakeland.⁶ Shortly before World War I, regular excavations were carried out on the grounds of the village of Chochół, most probably at the above-mentioned cemetery.⁷ Only a few brief mentions have been published about the results of the works,⁸ and given the loss of the acquired material due to the destruction of World War II, the primary sources of information on the site are now the records in the scientific files of archaeologists active in East Prussia before 1945. Of particular value is the scientific legacy of the Estonian re-

¹ Cf. Kalaga 2000; 2004; 2005; 2006.

² Białyński 2001, 16–33; 2006, 100–107.

³ Chochół, Szczycno County, former Friedrichsfelde, Kreis Ortelsburg.

⁴ Hollack 1908, map; Jaskanis 1974, map IA, № 25; 1977, map I, № 135.

⁵ Toeppen 1870, 46; Althertumsgesellschaft 1874, 669; Hollack 1908, 35.

⁶ Nowakowski 2007.

⁷ Tiska 1957, 290.

⁸ Åberg 1919, 154 № 113; Engel, La Baume 1937, 263, 269.

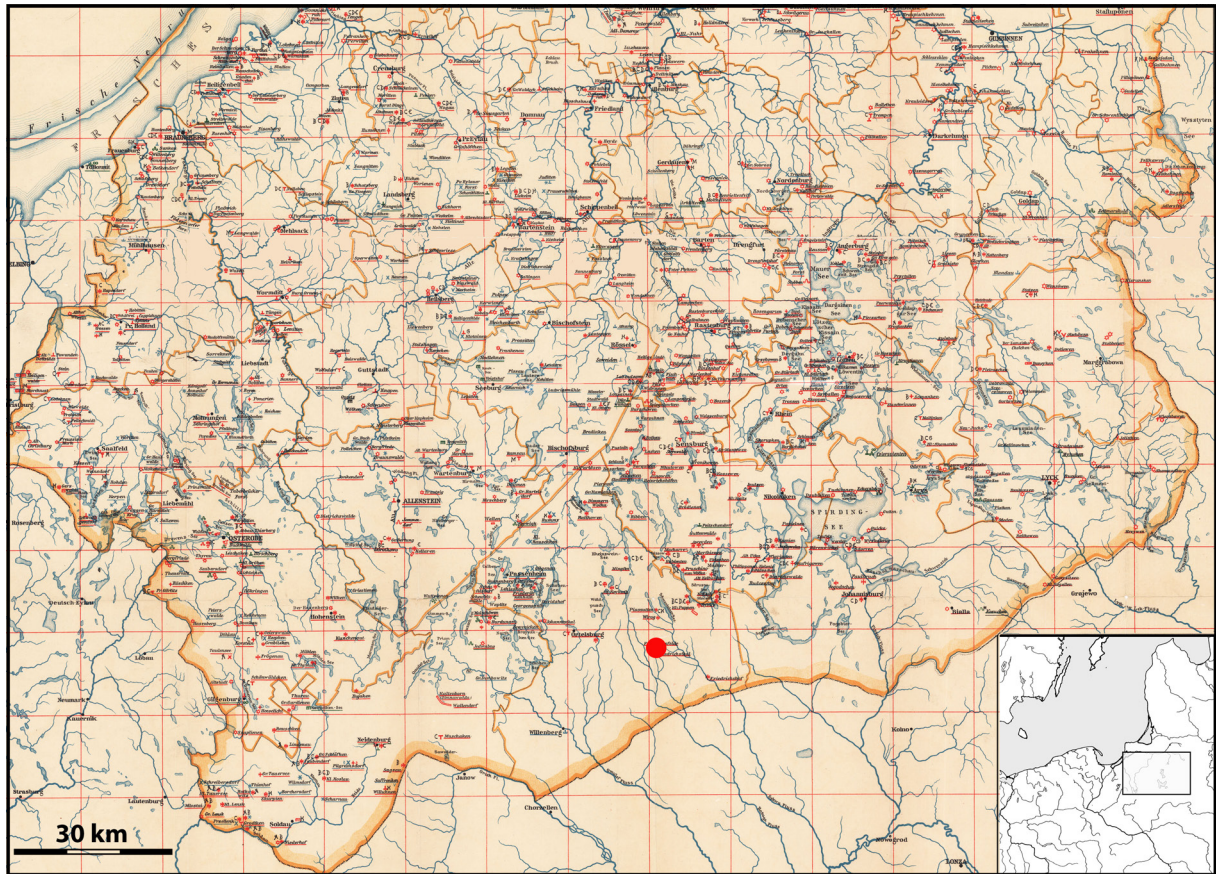


Fig. 1. The Chochół cemetery on a map of archaeological sites in East Prussia, discovered at the beginning of the 20th century (Source: Hollack 1908).

searcher Marta Schmiedehelm.⁹ On the above-described basis, it can be assumed that about 40 graves were excavated at the cemetery in question.¹⁰ Furthermore, a study of Schmiedehelm's legacy has made it possible to identify the artefacts entered in the third volume of the inventory books of the former *Prussia-Museum* in Königsberg as finds from Chochół.¹¹

Despite the poor state of preservation of the inventory book and the laconic nature of M. Schmiedehelm's notes, these two archival sources make it possible to conclude that the finds from the Chochół cemetery included a unique crossbow tendril brooch with a double spring¹² (Fig. 2:a). This identification is confirmed by other sources: at the end of the 1920s, the find was documented by

the Latvian archaeologist Felix Jakobson¹³ (Fig. 2:b), and, a few years later, it was mentioned by the Estonian researcher Harri Moora in his monumental study on the Iron Age of the eastern Baltic coast.¹⁴ The presence of the fibula of an atypical construction – the titular mystery – at the southern edge of the Masurian Lakeland should, therefore, be considered well attested.

On the basis of the sources mentioned, it can be concluded that the brooch had a curved bow of semicircular cross-section, with profiled metopes at both ends, and small knobs on the head and the ends of the axis bars of its two springs; altogether, the fibula differed from the typical Bogaczewo Culture specimens of Almgren type 162,¹⁵ including other specimens from the Chochół

⁹ For more information on the research activity of M. Schmiedehelm, see Laul 2011.

¹⁰ Juga-Szymańska, Szymański 2012, 108–109.

¹¹ Inventarbuch 3, sheets 001-0054; cf. Bitner-Wróblewska 2008, pl. XXXIII-XXXVI.

¹² Schmiedehelm, Legacy, № 7.13e-108; Inventarbuch 3, sheet 001; cf. Juga-Szymańska, Szymański 2012, 108.

¹³ Jakobson, Legacy; cf. Bitner-Wróblewska, Rzeszotarska-Nowakiewicz, Nowakiewicz 2011, CD Friedrichsfelde 001; for more information on the research activity of F. Jakobson and the scientific value of his legacy, see Ciglis 2011.

¹⁴ Moora 1938, 160, footnote 2.

¹⁵ Cf. Hollack, Peiser 1904, 43, 50, 54–55, pl. I:5.c; VII:42. a1-2, 43.a1, d1; IX:67.a; X:71.c1-2, 74.b, 76, 79.

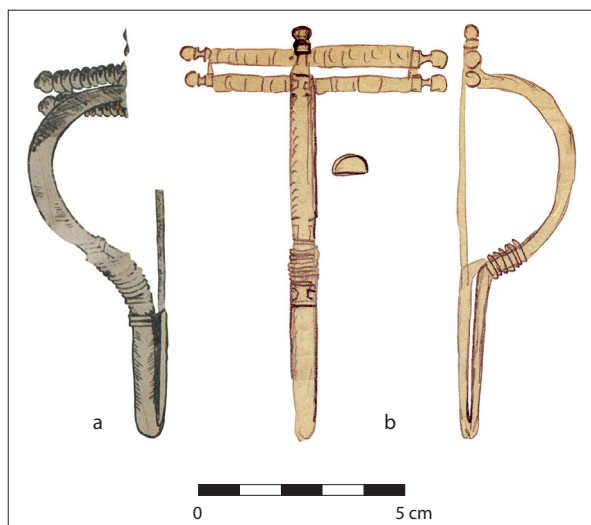


Fig. 2. The crossbow tendril brooch with a double spring from Chochół, grave 8 (after: a – *Inventarbuch* 3, sheet 1; b – Jakobson, *Legacy*).

cemetery,¹⁶ solely in the presence of an additional spring, which served only as a decoration without any utilitarian function.

The archival material available provides no information about grave 8, in which the described brooch was found; it is not even known whether it contained a cinerary urn. Most likely, the grave goods included a rectangular whetstone, recorded by M. Schmiedehelm¹⁷ and illustrated in the inventory book.¹⁸ Unfortunately, this artefact does not contribute to establishing the chronology of the titular find.

Brooches with two or three springs appeared in phases C₁-C₂ throughout central European *Barbaricum*; however, they were mainly specimens with a high catchplate¹⁹ or with a decorative plate on the head²⁰ and found primarily in so-called princely graves,²¹ as well as much later sheet brooches with a plano-semicircular head and rhomb-shaped foot, typical of the Černyakhov cul-

ture.²² Crossbow tendril brooches with double springs were noticeably rarer. They were sparsely scattered across the lands north of the Middle Danube²³ and were relatively numerous at Przeworsk Culture sites. They were specimens with ornamental notched wire rings, often made of silver,²⁴ representing a variant of Almgren type 167.²⁵ The very rare finds attributed to the Wielbark Culture represented a similar form.²⁶

A few specimens are known from the territory of the West Balt Circle, scattered in the area of the present-day Latvia and Lithuania²⁷ and usually found without any context. The Bogaczewo culture finds, apart from the specimen from Chochół, include only one other unconfirmed artefact from Bartlikowo,²⁸ which is not mentioned in the scientific archives of Schmiedehelm and Jakobson, carefully recording the Late Roman finds from Masuria. The omission of such an interesting find by both researchers raises the suspicion that Moora's classification of the fibula in question was, in fact, incorrect.

In this situation, the closest territorial and stylistic analogies to the Chochół brooch with a double spring are the relatively 'recent' finds from the Bol'soe Isakovo cemetery at the area of the Dollkeim/Kovrovo Culture, located at the outskirts of Königsberg.²⁹ Grave 40 contained a silver crossbow tendril brooch Almgren type 167, with a double spring and a pair of bronze crossbow brooches with a high catchplate of Almgren type 211.³⁰ However, due to the unclear stratigraphy of the feature, it cannot be ruled out that a cremation burial with the double-spring brooch was dug into a slightly earlier pit grave with the pair of Almgren-211 specimens.³¹ In grave 26, an iron crossbow tendril brooch with a double spring was accompanied by a specimen of Almgren type 167, i.e., a wire-coiled ornamented crossbow tendril brooch.³² Therefore, both grave assemblages from Bol'soe Isakovo should, based on the artefacts present in them, be dated to phases C_{1b}-C₂.³³ It then seems possible to place the two brooches with a double spring from Masuria in the same chronological range.

¹⁶ Bitner-Wróblewska 2008, pl. XXXIII; XXXV.

¹⁷ Schmiedehelm, *Legacy*, № 7.13e-108.

¹⁸ *Inventarbuch* 3, sheet 001.

¹⁹ Almgren 1897, 91, pl. IX:210; Palade 2004, 58-59, fig. 32:3; Mączyńska 2011, 67, pl. 18; Schuster 2018, 64-65, pl. XLV:4; Andrzejowski 2023, 103, pl. CXLIII.

²⁰ Przybyła 2018, 241-254, fig. 8:1; 8:4-7.

²¹ Almgren 1897, 79, 87, pl. VII:165, 184; Ondrouch 1957, 118-119, pl. 30; Pescheck 1978, 23-24, pl. 119, 5, 7.

²² Cf. Kokowski 1996.

²³ Parducz 1941, 313, pl. XVII:35-36; Ondrouch 1957, 118, pl. 29:9.

²⁴ Jakubczyk 2013, 155-156, pl. CXVII:4; CVIII; cf. Kmieciński 1952, 142, fig. 8; Kostrzewski, Chmielewski, Jądzewski 1965, 276, fig. 95:19.

²⁵ Almgren 1897, 78, pl. VII:167.

²⁶ Kempisty, Okulicz 1965, pl. 93; Kempisty 1968, 424, 440-441, fig. 45:u-w; Tuszyńska 2020, 65-66, pl. XII:l.

²⁷ Gibaičiai, Šauliai District; Mėžionys, Švencionis District – Moora 1938, 160, footnote 2; Michelbertas 1986, 121, fig. 40.2.

²⁸ Bartlikowo, Giżycko County, former Bartlickshof, Kreis Lötzen – cf. Moora 1938, 160, footnote 2.

²⁹ Skvorzov 2007.

³⁰ Skvorzov 2007, 131-132, pl. 47:20; 48,4-5.

³¹ Skvorzov 2007, 132, pl. 47.

³² Skvorzov 2007, 129, pl. 31:16-17.

³³ Cf. the dating of brooches type Almgren 211 – Mączyńska 2011, 65-66; on the subject of fibulae type Almgren 167 – Bitner-Wróblewska 2007, 49-50.

The uniqueness of the West Balt crossbow tendril brooches with a double spring suggests that their design was borrowed from the outside, but it is difficult to pinpoint the area that could be considered as their point of origin, as such specimens are even rarer in the neighbouring Wielbark Culture. In addition, the relatively simple West Balt specimens, made of bronze – with the exception of one silver item – and, in one case, even of iron, differ heavily from the richly decorated silver fibulae of the Wielbark culture.³⁴ The same observation also applies to the more numerous finds from the Przeworsk Culture, where silver, richly decorated exemplars are also predominant.³⁵ It can then be assumed that the first appearance of crossbow tendril brooches with a double spring in the Samland Peninsula and Masuria was the result of experiments undertaken by local craftsmen. They may have been inspired by the slightly earlier and much more frequent crossbow brooches with a high catchplate and double spring, found more commonly in the Wielbark Culture³⁶ and, especially, the Przeworsk

Culture³⁷ – the West Balt craftsmen tried, presumably, to combine the striking decoration provided by the double spring with the brooch design preferred by themselves or their customers.

Rejecting the identification of the double-spring brooches from the West Balt Circle as imports or imitations of specimens from the Wielbark Culture has implications for the interpretation of the Chochół cemetery – the fibula described cannot, in this situation, be regarded as an argument for linking this cemetery to the Wielbark Culture, which, in the late 3rd century, penetrated quite deeply into western Masuria.³⁸ The cemetery at Chochół must then be attributed to the late phase of the Bogaczewo Culture. However, the route by which the unique double-spring brooch found its way to the community using this small and rather poor cemetery, undoubtedly located ‘in the Middle of Nowhere’, has to remain a mystery.

Translated by Kinga Brzezińska

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Schmiedehelm, *Legacy* – scientific archive of Marta Schmiedehelm, kept in the Archaeological Research Collection of Tallinn University (Tallinna Ülikooli Arheoloogia Teaduskogu); cf. Juga-Szymańska, Szymański 2012.

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³⁴ Kempisty 1968, fig. 45:u–w.

³⁵ Cf. the brooch from Łódź-Retkinia, considered one of the arguments for identifying this feature as a ‘princely grave’ (Kmieciński 1952, 147–148).

³⁶ Cf. Andrzejowski 2023, 103, pl. CXLIII.

³⁷ Cf. Mączyńska 2011, 63–72.

³⁸ Cieśliński 2023, 172–186; cf. Fromm 1937; Bohnsack 1938a, 24, fig. 1; 1938b, 56.

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