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## A COMB OR A LOOM? AN ATTEMPT AT INTERPRETATION OF THE SZEMUD URN IMAGE

### ABSTRACT

Combs belong to characteristic motifs appearing on face urns from the Pomeranian culture. They are usually presented in the simplest way – in the form of several vertical lines coming from one horizontal line situated mostly in the central part of the urn. Archaeologists studying the Pomeranian culture accept an interpretation that all images comprised of vertical lines are combs (Dzięgielewski 2007: 183). The article presents another way of interpreting the engraving from the Szemud urn

which has been assumed to depict a comb. As it has been discussed, both the image itself (extremely long comb teeth) and the structural position of the image (directly under a face image) are not typical. The author suggests that it is rather a depiction of a vertical warp-weighted loom, as evidenced by other images known from Europe (e.g. Sopron, Bologna) dated to the Late Bronze Age and Early Iron Age.

### STRESZCZENIE

#### GRZEBIEŃ CZY KROSNO? PRÓBA INTERPRETACJI PRZEDSTAWIENIA NA URNIE Z SZEMUDU

Grzebienie należą do jednych z najbardziej charakterystycznych motywów pojawiających się na urnach twarzowych kultury pomorskiej. Zazwyczaj są przedstawiane w najprostszy sposób – w postaci kilku lub kilkunastu pionowych linii odchodzących od jednej linii poziomej. Najczęściej znajdują się w środkowej części urny. Archeolodzy badający kulturę pomorską przyjmują tę interpretację, w związku z czym wszystkie rytne na urnach złożone z pionowych linii uważane są za grzebienie. W artykule zaproponowano inną możliwą interpretację przedstawienia na urnie z Szemudu, które

wcześniej rozpatrywane było jako grzebień. W innych publikacjach zauważono, że zarówno samo przedstawienie (wyjątkowo długie zęby grzebienia), jak i jego położenie (bezpośrednio pod wyobrażeniem twarzy) są nietypowe. Autorka sugeruje, że jest to przedstawienie pionowego krosna ciężarkowego. Przekonanie to poparte jest innymi przedstawieniami pionowych krosien, zidentyfikowanych na różnych zabytkach archeologicznych znanych z Europy (np. Sopron, Bolonia), datowanych na późną epokę brązu i wczesną epokę żelaza.

**Keywords:** Face urns, vertical loom, Pomeranian culture, Early Iron Age

### Introduction

The Szemud hamlet is situated 14 km south from Wejherowo, on the Gościęcino River (Dobrogowski 1949: 299). Archaeological explorations were performed there nearly 80 years ago (between 1936 and 1938) and were supervised by Z. Zakrzewski. Two burial grounds

from the Pomeranian culture with a total of 21 cist graves containing face urns were excavated then. They were both single and family graves, with the oldest burials dating to Hallstatt C (c. 650 BC) and the majority – to Hallstatt D (c. 450 BC) (Dąbrowski 2009: 17). The latest burials were dated to the early La Tène period (Dobrogowski 1949: 314). The present paper

discusses one of the urns excavated in the Cemetery II, which is currently kept in the District Museum in Toruń, with a signature no. A/1505. The urn was reconstructed some years ago (empty spaces were filled with plaster). In the author's opinion, the engraving made on the urn (under the schematically sketched face) can be an image of a vertical warp-weighted loom. Since the author has specialised for some years in the textile manufacture of communities of the Late Bronze Age and Early Iron Age on the Polish territory (she is also skilled at weaving and spinning), it was evident for her, judging from the appearance of the urn picture, that this image showed a vertical warp-weighted loom. Such interpretation becomes even more convincing when the picture is compared with other images of vertical looms coming from the south of Poland (Grömer 2016: 110). Although these images occur rarely, they are similar and each of them contains the most characteristic elements of the vertical looms. To understand the archaeological object's context and images placed on them, it is necessary first to present some information concerning the Pomeranian culture and the phenomenon of the face urns.

### Current state of research on face urns

The Pomeranian culture (also called the Face Urn culture or the East Pomeranian culture) developed within the territory of present-day Poland between the 7<sup>th</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> century BC, originating from the Lusatian culture, in the area of the Vistula and the Parsęta rivers basin, and expanding further to the south. This culture is characterised by burials in urns with face images on them. The urns were placed in cist graves (hence its another alternative name – the 'Cist-graves culture'). Pictures engraved on urns represent not only faces themselves but also hunting scenes, chariots and riders, animals (rare motifs of deer, horses, cows, and birds), weaponry (spears and shields), as well as clothing accessories, such as pins, clasps, belts, necklaces, and combs. Aleksander Kwapiński (2005: 307–314) tried to systematise all the images and also indicated that particular types of images were placed in defined urn sectors, *e.g.* necklaces, breastplates, and pins were usually placed on a vessel's neck or its base, while figurative scenes appear only in the upper urn part (Kwapiński 2005: 315).

Distribution of the face urns around such a vast area – Germany, Denmark, Poland, Sweden, Norway, and Italy – indicates intensive interactions between populations inhabiting the lands listed above. Figurative images appear on urns dated to the Hal C-La Tène A (650–400 BC), according to the Central-European chronology (Kniesel 2016: 393). The majority of the face urns (*c.* 3000) were excavated in Poland, in the cemeteries of the Pomeranian culture (Kniesel 2016: 406). Urns from

Poland have more complex faces with clearly outlined elements, like mouth, chin, ears, or eyes. Jutta Kniesel (2016: 404) remarked that face urns occur in territories rich in natural resources, such as salt and amber. Moreover, objects imported from the south have been registered in Central and Northern Europe, which leads to a conclusion that they witness existence of regional centres, which contacted with one another over long distances (Kniesel 2016: 405), and trade routes, which served not only for transporting luxurious commodities and raw material but also some particular ideas.

The Face Urn culture has been fascinating archaeologists for decades. Face images and compositions consisting of various pictures engraved on them were subjects of particular interest to researchers (*e.g.* Łuka 1978; Kowalska 1998; Kwapiński 1993; 1998; 2003). Much attention was paid to the problem of the symbolism of the faces. First, they were interpreted as images of persons buried in particular urns, which cannot be true since there are numerous cases where several individuals had been buried in one urn (Kowalska 1998: 41). A face may rather be a symbolic human model (Kowalska 1998: 42). The question of interpretation of iconography of the urns is still open.

Generally, the majority of publications concerning the Pomeranian culture concentrate on collecting and typologically ordering all the groups of images. Therefore, there are works registering representations of weapons (Fogel 1980), shields (Bukowski 1971), chariots (Kwapiński 1993), animals (Sylwestrowicz 1979), earrings (Andrzejowska 1981), clasps (Gedl 1993), necklaces and breastplates (Kamińska 1992), and combs (Dzięgielewski 2007). There were also attempts at correlating particular images (breastplates, shields, or pins) with archaeological gender indicators (such as *e.g.* earrings) and anthropologically defined gender of the buried individuals (Malinowski 1966). However, these studies have not brought any definite answers. The burial rite of the Pomeranian culture itself was a subject of interest as well (*e.g.* Malinowski 1966; Kowalska 1998; 2003; 2005; Woźny 2000). Pomeranian urns were also a subject of philosophical debates on how archaeologists perceive symbols and objects (*e.g.* M. Kwapiński 2000a; 2000b; Woźny 2001).

### The urn from Szemud

The present contribution discusses the urn from Grave I, Cemetery II. It was a single grave containing one pear-shaped urn with polished walls in brownish/orange colour (Fig. 1.A). A roughly-sketched face (on side A) consisting of ears and a nose was depicted on it. Each of the ears had three holes with bronze rings. The grooves situated under the sketched face were components

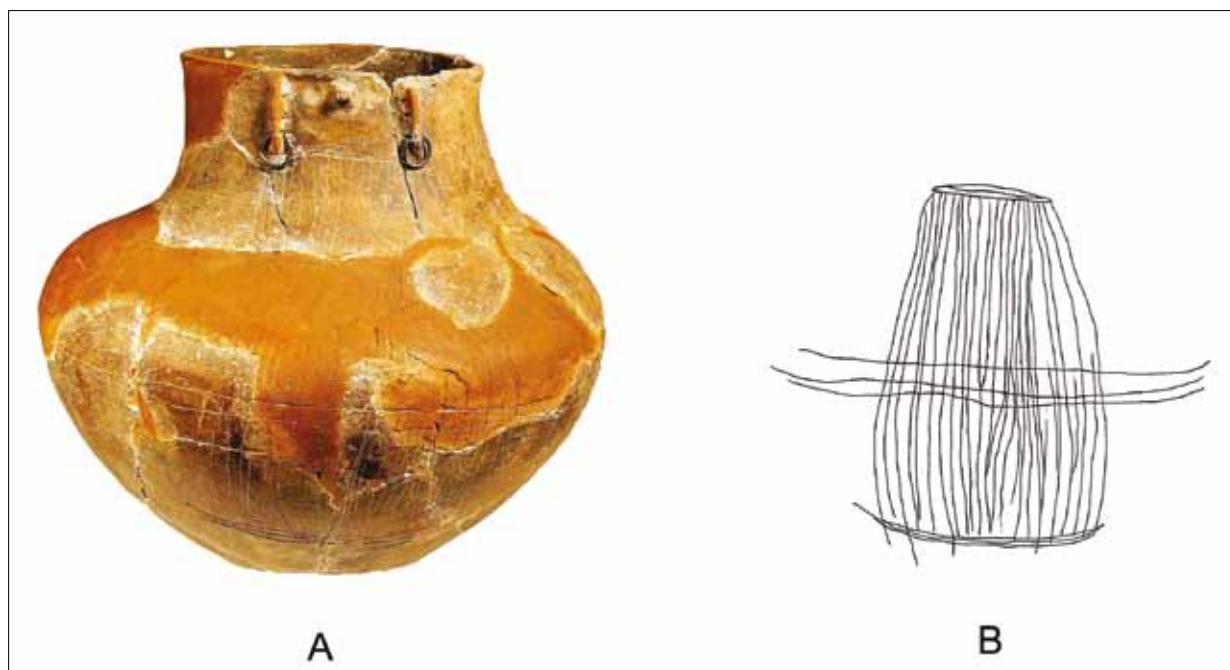


Fig. 1. A – reconstructed urn from the District Museum in Toruń (photo by M. Przymorska-Sztuczka); B – engraving on the urn (drawing by M. Przymorska-Sztuczka).

of a single image. There were between 21 and 24 lines engraved vertically. At each end, they were framed by three horizontal lines. In the middle, three longer vertical lines were carved around the urn. The whole image was trapezoidal in shape (Fig. 1.B). Three vertical lines situated on side B were separate engravings not belonging to the described image. The urn contained bones of an adult individual arranged in the anatomical order. The skull area contained a find of a triangular iron pendant. The urn was preserved in fragments and only its drawing reconstruction has been published so far (Kwapiński 1999) (Fig. 2.B). The first photograph of the urn after its conservation and reconstruction is published in the present article (Fig. 1.A).

In the literature, the imagery of the Szemud urn is described as four separate elements. The first one, situated under the schematically sketched face (side A), is described as a comb – “ryt złożony z 3 kresek poziomych i odchodzących od nich 20–21 kresek pionowych o niespotykanej, w przypadku wizerunków grzebieni, długości; ryt umiejscowiony na szyi urny twarzowej w miejscu ust (umiejscowienie rytu jest także nietypowe)”<sup>1</sup> (Dzięgielewski 2007: 203). On the belly of the vessel, there are three grooves running around, which were

interpreted by M. Kwapiński as a breastplate (1999: 177). However, the images of breastplates and necklaces are usually located higher, in the upper part of vessels’ necks. Below the image, on the urn’s neck in the bottom part, there is the last image – a rectangular figure filled with vertical lines (Dobrogowski 1949: 306; Kwapiński 1999: 177). On the opposite side (B) from these images, there are three short vertical grooves (Kwapiński 1999: 177).

The description of the urn and the drawing from Dobrogowski’s article (Fig. 2.A) differ significantly from the descriptions quoted in the later publications (Dobrogowski 1949; Kwapiński 1999; Dzięgielewski 2007). Dobrogowski does not mention any lines surrounding the entire urn, although they are clearly marked. Moreover, the older drawing presents the image only in the upper urn section, while in the later publications (Fig. 2.B) it occupies practically all the vessel’s height (Kwapiński 1999: 177). Drawing reconstruction of the urn from Szemud in Dobrogowski’s article is too schematic and figures are inappropriately located.

What may be the reasons for these differences in presenting the same object? Facing so many doubts and various descriptions, the author decided to examine the problematic item by herself. On the reconstructed

<sup>1</sup> In author’s translation: “the engraving consists of three horizontal lines and 20–21 vertical lines coming out of them, with lengths unusual for comb images; the engraving is situated on

the urn’s neck, in the place of a mouth (the location is also unusual)”.

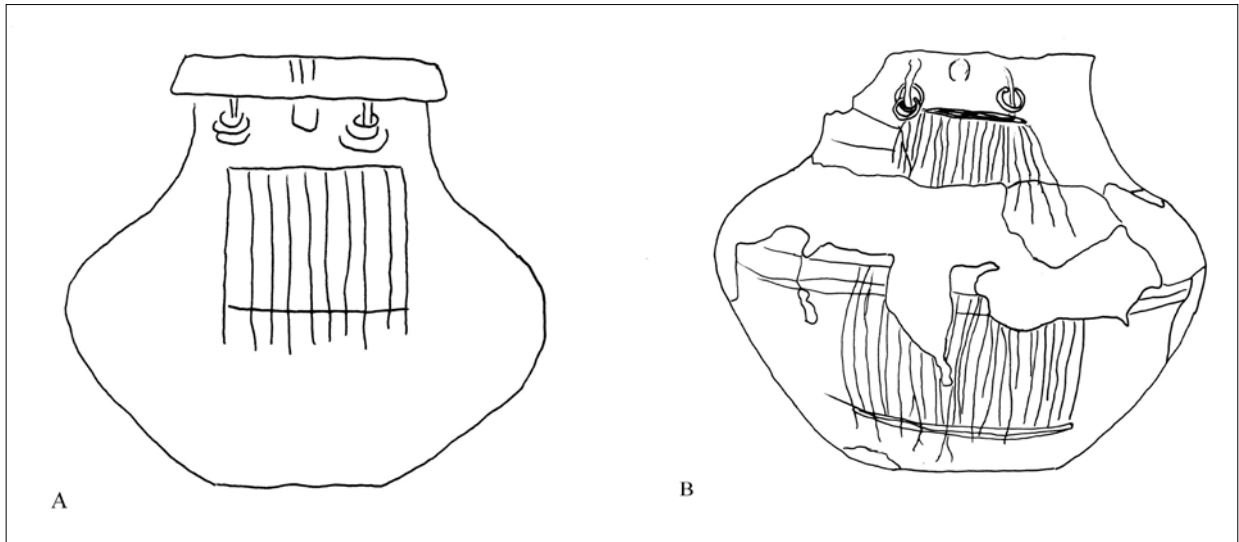


Fig. 2. A – urn from Szemud after Dobrogowski (1949: Fig. 13.2); B – after Kwapiński (1999: Tab. CLXXXVI).

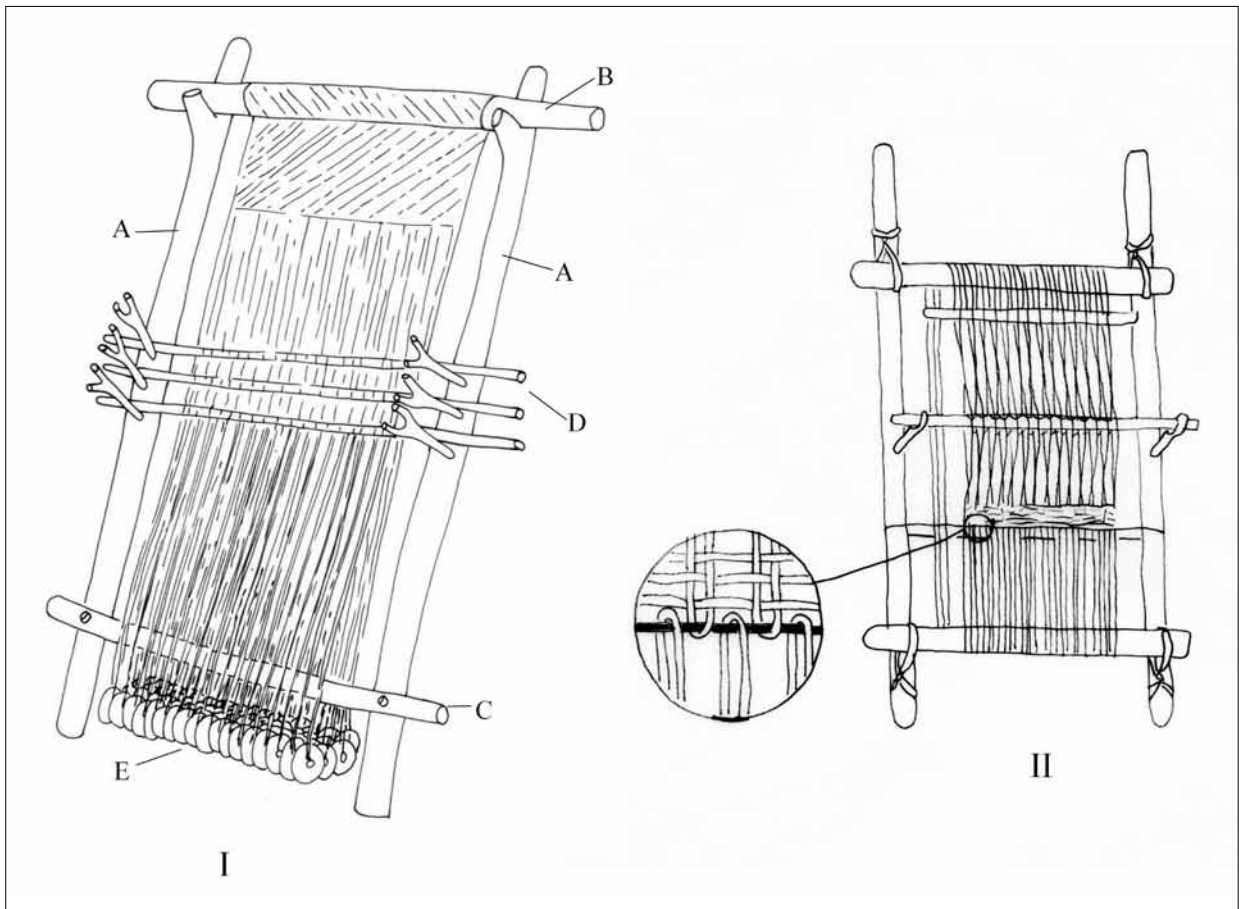


Fig. 3. I – scheme of the vertical warp-weighted loom (drawing by A. Jeppsson, Centre for Textile Research, University of Copenhagen, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Warp-weighted\\_loom\\_twill.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Warp-weighted_loom_twill.jpg), accessed 1.12.2017); II – scheme of the two-beam vertical loom (after Grömer 2016: Fig. 79).

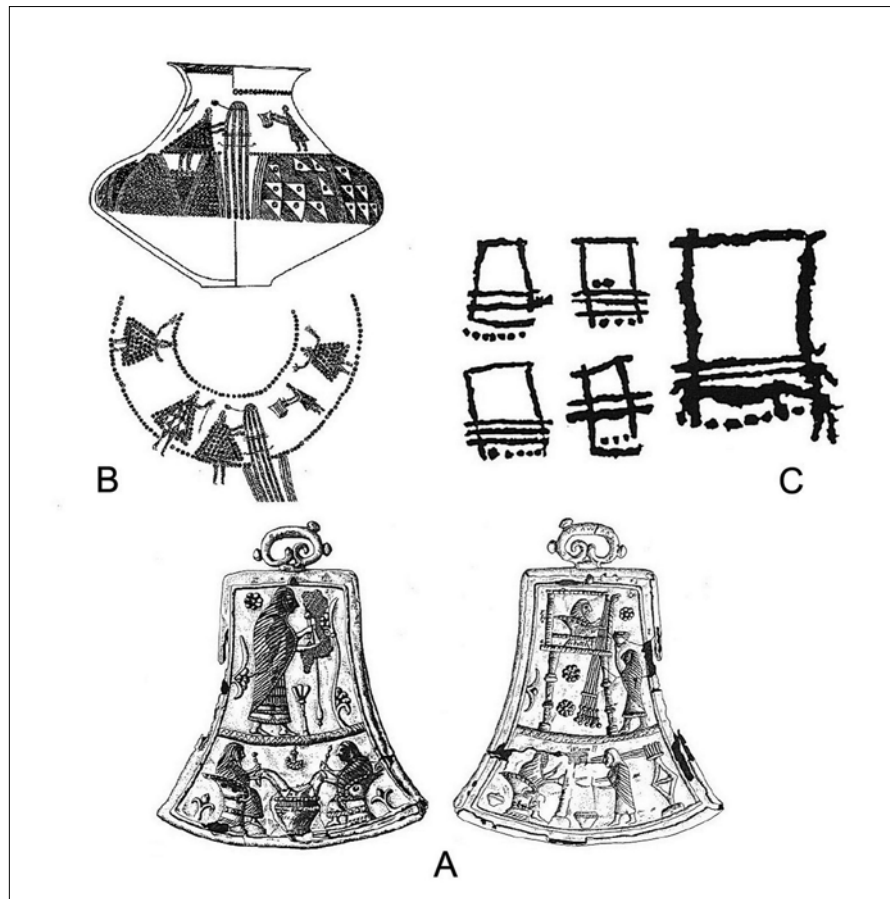


Fig. 4. Loom images on historical objects: A – tintinnabulum from Bologna (after M. Gleba 2012: Fig. 9.16); B – vase from Sopron (after Chmielewski 2011: Fig. 111); C – engravings from Val Camonica (after Bazzanella 2012: Fig. 8.15).

object, the supposed comb and the rectangular figure situated under it were connected into a single whole. As it was mentioned in the Introduction, the author postulates a new interpretation of the image as a vertical warp-weighted loom.

To see the similarity of the discussed image with a real vertical loom one must learn the loom construction first. Generally, there are two types of vertical looms – the warp-weighted (Fig. 3.I) and two-beam (Fig. 3.II) vertical looms. Both have similar construction – they are equipped with a frame consisting of two vertical beams, two horizontal beams, and heddles. They differ in the manner of setting up and stretching the warp threads. In the two-beam loom, warp threads can be spanned between the upper and the bottom beam. Next, they run around the bar marking the warp's end, turn back, and run upwards to the top beam (Barber 1991: 115; Grömer 2016: 139). The warp-weighted loom is made of a frame consisting of two vertical posts (Fig. 3.A), which keep a horizontal beam up (Fig. 3.B), to which warp threads are fixed. The warp threads are tensioned by loom weights (Fig. 3.E). At the loom bottom, there is also a shed bar separating the warp threads (Fig. 3.C). This type of loom is often placed leaning against a wall at some angle

(although it is not a rule), which creates a natural shed through which weft thread is passed. To make another shed, warp threads at the back of the separating beam must be pulled forward, before those which are not moved. To do it, the heddles knotted to the back layer of the warp are required. By pulling them forward, the back threads are drawn before the front threads and another shed is opened for the weft (Broudy 1979: 25).

To make a more complicated weave, such as twill weave which was more popular than the tabby in the Halstatt period in Central Europe (Grömer 2016: 129), additional heddles are required. Their number depends on a type of the vertical loom and a type of the twill weave which one wants to produce. To obtain 2/2 and 3/1 twill weave on the warp-weighted loom, one must divide the warp threads into four rows and use three heddles (Fig. 3.D). While working on the two beam loom, one uses four heddles (Barber 1991: 187). Consecutive heddles with rows of warps fixed to them are pulled front and back in pairs in a proper order (Chmielewski 2011: 209).

Knowing the vertical loom's construction, we are able to interpret its particular elements in the image from the Szemud urn discussed above. Starting from the top part: horizontal lines situated below the face may stand

for the upper loom beam with the fixed warp threads represented by vertical lines running down the urn's height. Lines placed on the bottom part may depict a beam separating the warp and the loom base. Three lines surrounding the entire urn located in the middle of the image can be interpreted as three heddles (this part of the image raises the author's greatest doubts because the grooves are engraved around the entire urn). If one accepts this point of view (or if this interpretation may be considered acceptable), the engraving can be interpreted as the earliest image of the vertical loom in Poland but also as a loom setup for making twill weaves.

Several depictions of the warp-weighted loom and other activities related to textile production, such as spinning, can be found in Greek vase painting (Barber 1991: 92). There are also a few depictions of textile implements on archaeological objects from Southern and Central Europe (Fig. 4). These are images from a tintinnabulum from Bologna (Fig. 4.A) and the throne from Verucchio in Italy, as well as from the vase from the burial mound (Tumulus 27) from Sopron in Hungary (Fig. 4.B), dated to between 800 and 500 BC (Grömer 2016: 108–110). Seven warp-weighted looms carved into a rock in Val Camonica Valley in Italy are absolutely unique finds (Fig. 4.C). Unfortunately, their dating is insecure and ranges from 1400 BC (Bazzanella 2012: 211) to 800–500 BC (Grömer 2016: 110). All of these images demonstrate elements that are most characteristic for vertical looms, such as the vertical and horizontal beams, heddles, warp threads, and weights (Grömer 2016: 110).

The assumed vertical loom shown on the Szemud urn suits a vast chronology of images listed above (the

grave with the urn is dated to the Hallstatt D, *i.e.* approximately 650–450 BC). Despite the apparent lack of loom weights (maybe this is the warp alone just prepared for weaving?) the author is convinced that the image depicts a warp-weighted loom. Using this type of loom in the Late Bronze Age and Early Iron Age is evidenced by numerous finds of loom weights from Poland, *e.g.* from Biskupin (Balcer 1961), Bnin (Szamałek *et al.* 1979), Słupca (Malinowski 1958), or Gazdowice-Kwiatoniów (Macewicz, Wuszkán 1991).

## Conclusions

Images from urns of the Pomeranian culture have already been a subject of numerous publications, just as many of their aspects, such as symbolism, rituals, categories, *etc.* The aim of this article was not to create another typology of motifs but rather to suggest a possible different interpretation of the urns' iconography. The engraving from the Szemud urn from Grave I has already been interpreted as a comb image. Despite some doubts concerning its unusual location and excessive teeth length (Kwapiński 1998: 167; Dziegielewska 2007: 203), nobody has suggested a new interpretation of this image up until now. However, the author suggests a new, different interpretation of the object. According to her analysis, this may be the first image of the warp-weighted loom preserved in Poland. This calls for a new, different interpretation of the object and draws attention to the need for a careful review of the existing iconographic interpretations.

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