

# Elements of military equipment from Thorsberg Moor (finished)

Dr. Suzana Matešić

## Evidence of Roman-Germanic contacts

A substantial proportion of the finds from a war booty offering naturally comprises weapons and other military equipment. Due to limiting preservational factors arising from the prevailing acid pH at the site, detailed chronological studies at Thorsberg have been abandoned for important artefact groups such as iron spear- and lance-heads. Therefore, in terms of a chronological and typological classification of the assemblage, attention must instead be focussed on sword and shield elements made of copper alloys and precious metal.



The overall picture reveals that only isolated finds can be related to an early deposition in C1a, whereas the main body of the assemblage dates from period C1b; only a few later finds can be assigned to period C2/C3.

In contrast to other find groups within the military equipment, and in particular in the case of sword components, a large number of objects are of provincial Roman origin. Consequently, Roman finds comprise about 20% of the scabbard slides. Unfortunately, it is not always possible to reach a precise conclusion regarding the origin of the objects. This problem is clearly seen when considering the chapes from Thorsberg. Not only were provincial Roman chapes used; Roman types were both copied and adapted according to Germanic artistic perceptions such that new Germanic types ultimately arose. Chapes cast in one piece, and bearing Germanic ornamental elements, prove that Roman casting techniques were also adopted by Germanic craftsmen. Even the scabbard slides which, at first glance, are very easy to separate into provincial Roman and Germanic types, on a second glance reveal Roman influences in the form of adapted motifs.

In addition to offensive weapons, the finds from Thorsberg also include parts of body armour, such as items of chain mail. Helmets, which are very unusual finds in the Barbaricum, are nevertheless also documented by at least three examples at Thorsberg. Deserving of particular attention is a Germanic silver helmet with technical features referring back to the Roman mask helmets used as models.

The occurrence in the Germanic area of shield bosses with a hemispherical dome can be traced back to Roman influences. Concentric grooves, considered to originate from surface treatment on a lathe, are a distinctive feature and are taken as evidence of the provincial Roman provenance of these artefacts. However, this criterion should be re-evaluated as the mark left by a lathe centre on an evidently Germanic shield boss must be viewed as evidence for it having been turned as a piece of Germanic craftsmanship, unless it is possible that it represents a re-worked Roman shield boss.

It is clear that a central aspect concerning the analysis and interpretation of military equipment is determination of the provenance of the finds and their previous owner. In the case of the Roman finds, Roman-Germanic connections occupy the foreground. Seen collectively, the Thorsberg finds dating from C1b must be considered as evidence of a mixed Roman-Germanic horizon.

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