

## HISTORY

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### Prehistoric cultures of warriors or warriors of prehistoric cultures?

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**Abstract:**

The article primarily aims at answering the question about the presence of warriors in prehistoric cultures of Central Europe. The author studies this issue on the basis of archaeological sources (material evidence of the existence of the cultures). He also uses written sources from the late antiquity. He concludes that prehistoric weapons are of crucial importance and their interpretation depends mainly on the contexts they are found in. What is also significant is the quality and quantity of particular types of armament. There are many arguments in support of the thesis concerning prevalence of symbols and meanings of e.g. the sword. In a synthetic sense, we can talk about two basic models: presence of a culture of warriors (referring mostly to the nomads) or just knowledge of war craft (referring to settled, farming communities).

The question in the title is not just an accidental play on words. It juxtaposes two situations which, despite certain similarity, have fundamental differences. The concept of ‘the culture of warriors’ implies the existence of a broadly defined socio-cultural system in which the warrior is a key figure as a representative of a certain subculture or even as an essential element in the social hierarchy. In the realm of Central Europe we can notice it most explicitly in the Middle Ages, when the figure of the knight was identified not only with an appropriate social status but, above all, with a particular ethos and code of behaviour, which was well exposed in many chivalric epics. The chivalry included the accolade, the unwritten code of honour, tournaments, rich tradition of heraldry and identifying symbols and even the funeral ceremony [Piwowarczyk 2006: 8-24]. These universal components, together with the adapted Christian elements, can be considered the basic determinant of this period in the whole medieval Europe. Comparison of the commonly accepted and desired chivalric qualities with the eight virtues of Bushido (rectitude, courage, benevolence, respect, honesty, honour, loyalty, character) clearly shows that there was considerable similarity between

the two codes, despite the evident cultural and geographical differences. This raises the question to what extent these features are independent of the specific cultural and historical conditions and whether they reach much further – for example the ancient and prehistoric Europe. Another term in the title refers to ‘the warriors of prehistoric cultures’ in the sense that emphasizes their presence (permanent or accidental), but without the whole realm identified with the ‘subculture’ of warriors described above. Therefore their social role would not have been important, especially in the context of hierarchical social structures.

Before we attempt to answer the question posed at the beginning, we should point out that the further we go back into prehistory, the more modest and ambiguous sources will be available to us. Eventually we will be left only with material findings from archaeological excavations as well as relatively frequent accidental findings – e.g. weapons, which in this case are of particular interest. Their detailed examination is the domain of prehistoric archaeology, since in the reconstruction process it utilizes the material sources from the excavations, but for their interpretation it also takes advantage of other disciplines, such as history (in

terms of the analysis of written sources) or cultural anthropology (e.g. with regard to the function and significance of objects). Modern archaeology is not only about recorded findings of particular objects (only weapons [Libera 2006]) but it is also about the contexts of their occurrence (e.g. especially important grave inventories), because they often affect the final interpretation [Вандкилде 2009: 269-270]. Thus, this kind of inference is of interdisciplinary character.

Prehistoric Europe (from the earliest times to the mid-1<sup>st</sup> millennium AD) is a mosaic of many tribes and cultures. In this brief sketch it is difficult to give an exhaustive answer to the question about significance or even the existence (or its lack) of the group of specialised warriors. I can only focus here on several broader issues. Firstly, we should emphasize source deficiencies and lack of broader points of reference, which is a result of limited interpretation based on material (archaeological) artefacts. The classification of weapon as 'a tool of war' and distinguishing it from 'a hunting tool' may already be considered controversial. In the development of civilization, particularly with regard to older periods, it is almost impossible. It is obvious that the effectiveness of flint tools used for hunting (javelins – spears armed with flint blades, bows with arrows with insets) or fighting was similar, which is proved by the experimental archaeology [Coles 1977: 167-175]. However, the question that is bothering us here refers to the existence of a group of warriors. In the Palaeolithic (up to about 10<sup>th</sup>-9<sup>th</sup> millennium BC) and Mesolithic (9<sup>th</sup>-6<sup>th</sup> millennium BC) communities each man had to be a hunter, since hunting was the primary source of obtaining food. Both material (flint tools from the excavations) and intangible (interpretations of cultural anthropology) aspects allow us to indicate that the line between being a hunter and a warrior could have been very easy to cross. Evolution of a group of specialized warriors is therefore not a matter of some technological threshold (effectiveness of fighting tools), but rather a demand of society. It was well captured by the definitions of war and fighting [Harrison 2008] which stress the specified group target. In the period discussed here we certainly cannot talk about it. Fighting occurs only on a personal level, to achieve personal benefits (such as in *Quest for Fire* [Rosny 1998], popularised by the film of the same title). In the cultural system there could not have existed a specialised group of warriors as a kind of subculture, typical of the subsequent periods. But there was present a group of hunters which was using intricate and effective hunting strategies as well as magic and beliefs related to them [Eliade 1988: 17-21; Szyjewski 2001:

243-284]. However, the subcultures of hunters and warriors, although similar in some respects, are different or even contradictory.

The situation changed quite markedly in the Neolithic (6<sup>th</sup> – 3<sup>rd</sup> millennium BC) – a period that is regarded by archaeologists as the beginning of modernity. The main determinants were in this case sedentary lifestyle and farming. Attachment to a specific territory, effort required to build permanent dwellings (settlements with houses), and the need to protect the cultivated fields and herds of animals were the factors that certainly triggered some defence mechanisms. In a relatively short period of time (for prehistoric reality) – the Neolithic and the late Bronze Age (second half of the 3<sup>rd</sup> – 2<sup>nd</sup>/1<sup>st</sup> millennium BC) – we can observe an increasing importance of weapon and even the emergence of defensive architecture – various systems preventing access to the inhabited settlements. The grave inventory is gradually changing and in the whole of Central Europe it has a role of the identifier of social status or it even indicates one's belonging to a certain group of military character, which probably formed a kind of subculture, precisely defined and identified, yet nowadays difficult to recognize [Zakościelna 2008; Вандкилде 2009: 273-280], in cultural anthropology known as war clubs or brotherhoods [Nowicka 1997: 386-387]. In the inventories of some graves we find objects that at the beginning still have a dual function (weapon-tool – e.g. long flint knives), but they already clearly identify only a certain group of men [Вандкилде 2009: 281-287]. In 4<sup>th</sup> – 3<sup>rd</sup> millennium BC there appear in the grave inventory shaft-hole axes, made of horn, stone or copper, almost always placed in front of the face of the dead, which distinguishes the graves of men [Вандкилде 2009: 287-290], buried in a different – in comparison with women – ritual (different orientation of the bodies). These objects certainly are no longer only 'tools', although small heads of arrows or larger heads of spears which accompany them, can still have a 'dual use'.

The axe, particularly that of a double blade, regardless of what material it is made from, has a deep symbolic significance. It manifests power, often being an attribute of gods [Eduardo 2007: 423-424; Lurker 2011: 460]. Therefore it does not come as a surprise that it was so significant in grave inventories of the late Neolithic and early Bronze Age [Zapotocký 1992].

In the Bronze Age (2<sup>nd</sup> half of the 3<sup>rd</sup> – beginning of the 1<sup>st</sup> millennium BC) the role of the shaft-hole axe is taken over by the knobbed shaft-hole axe. It is also at this time when another item, perhaps the most important in our discussion, occurs – that is the sword. It is, like the dagger, evidently

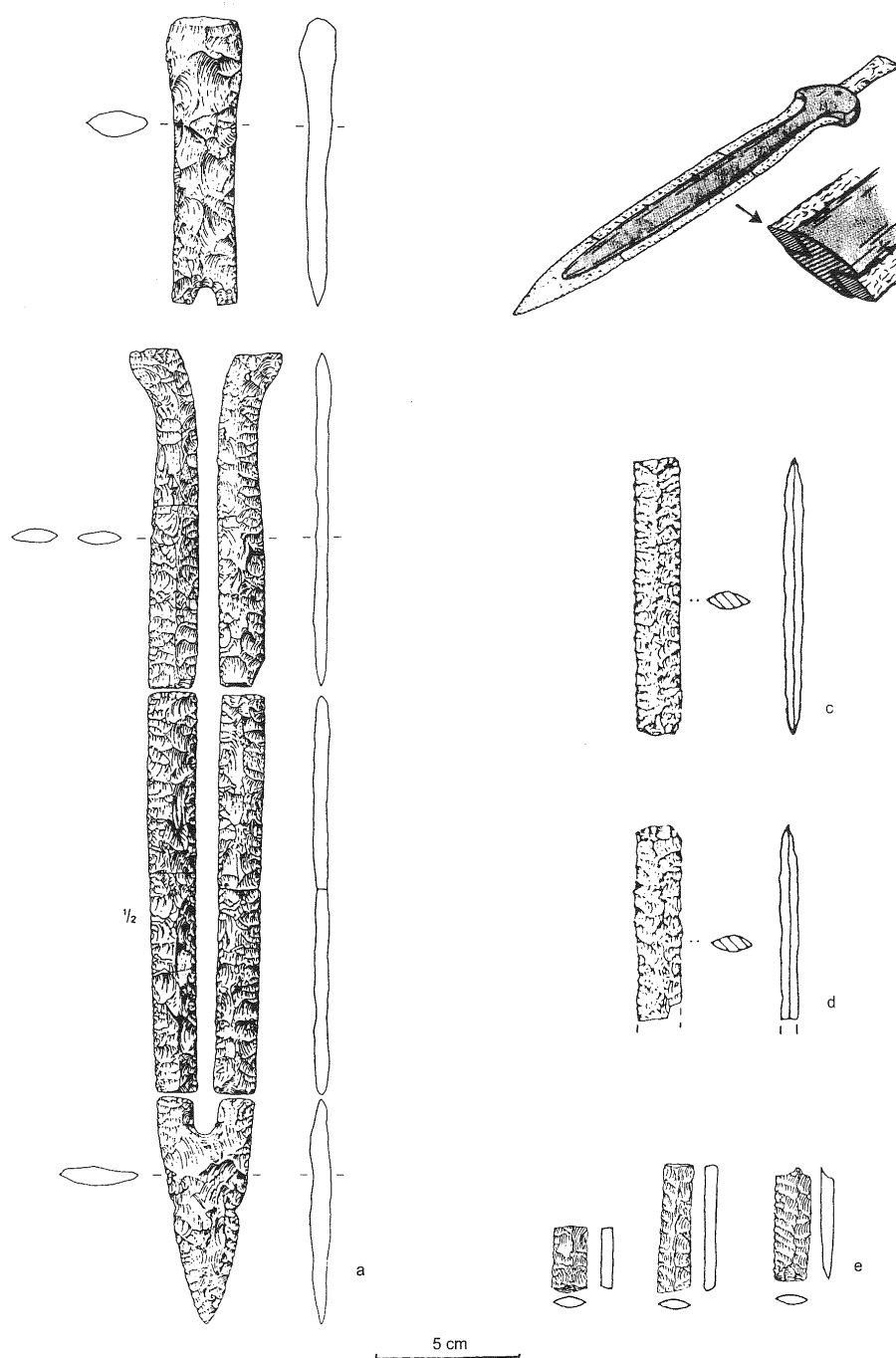


Fig. 1. Reconstruction of the „Aatte sword” [by P. Rønne 1988, after Libera 2001, fig. 24]

associated with fighting, and its popularity lasts for a very long time – to the modernity. In the European archaeology swords are inseparably linked with the era of metal. On the outskirts of contemporary cultural centres we are dealing only with single instances of its occurrence (of more symbolic rather than functional character), where crucial role is played by flint blades (serving as flint insets or even entire daggers – fig. 1).

The major line of development, of Mediterranean origin, is concerned with the use of metal – at first bronze (i.e. an alloy of copper and tin) and

later iron. The process of sword production was complicated and it required high technical skills and availability of an adequate quantity of raw material, which was particularly important in the Bronze Age. Therefore, the material value of a sword must have been high. It is also worth paying attention to the temporal relationship between these objects and the increasing differentiation of prehistoric societies. Weapon of this kind is regarded by many archaeologists as one of the attributes of power, especially as such findings are not frequent. Thus, if there is any archaeological artefact that can be

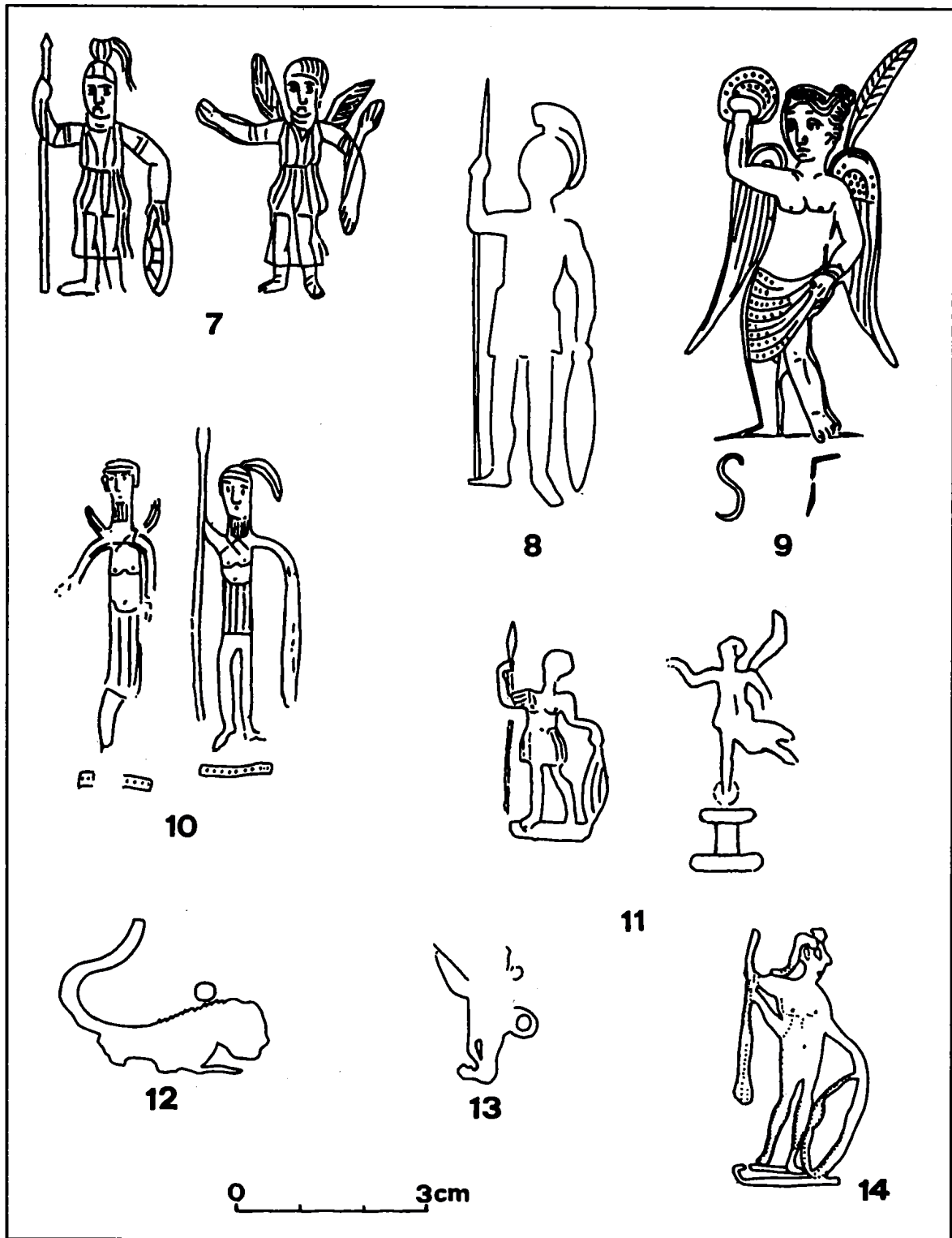


Fig. 2. Figural representations on the upper part of swords from the Roman period: 7 – Lorch, Austria (Mars), 8 – Oblin, Poland (Mars), 9 – Øvre Stabu, Norway (Victoria), 10 – Podlódów, Poland (Mars + Victoria), 11 – Javneker, Norway (Mars), 12 – La Dubs a Pontoux, France (lion) 13 – Żurawiczki, Poland (Victoria), 14 – Lllerup, Denmark (Mars) [Biborski 1994, fig. 7]

regarded as an attribute of a warrior, at the same time designating his affiliation to a particular subculture, it is undoubtedly the sword. It is even sanctioned by the medieval legal system in which we have clearly defined regulations regarding its use.

A lot of information from the written sources, but also the archaeological observations with the majority of artefacts, especially Central-European ones [Fogel 1979: 27-79, 88-110] indicate that the spear still remained the major weapon. It was the

main armament of the Greeks at Troy [Castleden 2008: 110-111] and also later – for many other peoples and cultures. Even for the Celts (2<sup>nd</sup> half of the 1<sup>st</sup> millennium BC), among whom an iron sword was quite widespread, it remained the main weapon used to strike a blow [Birkhan 1997: 1131-1132]. It is also the sword that is mentioned by Tacitus when characterising weapon of the Germans at the turn of the eras: *Even iron is by no means abundant with them, as we may gather from the character of their weapons. Only a few have swords and heavy spears. They carry lances, 'frameae' as they call them, with the iron point narrow and short, but so sharp and so easy to handle that they employ them either for stabbing or for throwing as occasion demands. A lance and a shield are arms enough for a horseman; the footmen have also darts to hurl: each man carries several, and, being naked or only lightly clad with a little cloak, they can hurl them to an immense distance* [P. Cornelius Tacitus, *Germania*, VI]. Contrary to the spear, the sword can (and should) be regarded first and foremost as an indication of a warrior's status. *The sword is a characteristic weapon and almost exclusively reserved for the highest dignitaries* [Eduardo 2007: 255]. Thus, there are clear differences – functional (the way of fighting), quantitative (popularity of spears and javelins, first made of bronze and later of iron), semantic (symbol in the military hierarchy) and even symbolic (spear – an earthly weapon, sword – a divine weapon [Eduardo 2007: 254-255, 455; Lurker 2011: 460]. Symbolic role of the sword can be proved for example by the legends, deeply-rooted in the European culture (certainly originating from the prehistoric times) – e.g. King Arthur's Excalibur. The swords from the Roman period (first centuries AD) can be considered a synthesis of these elements. They were widely known from the *Barbaricum* territories, decorated in the upper part of the blade with images of gods – e.g. Mars and Victoria (fig. 2), identified with war and fighting [Biborski 1994: 124-125].

In terms of the complementation of the functions of the axe and the sword, archaeology provides yet other interesting observation, that is a remarkable similarity in the way of decorating swords and axes (war shaft-hole axes), visible for example among the artefacts from the Bronze Age (fig. 3 – 4). This fact can be interpreted as a desire to supply these unique weapons with an additional meaning – a differentiator other than a functional one. What was important was no longer only their shape and durability, affecting the effectiveness of the fight, but also their additional quality, which is today regarded even as prehistoric art. This group of artefacts is captured under the term 'ceremonial weapon', which plays the role of a symbol (sign), at the same time remaining a material proof of the process

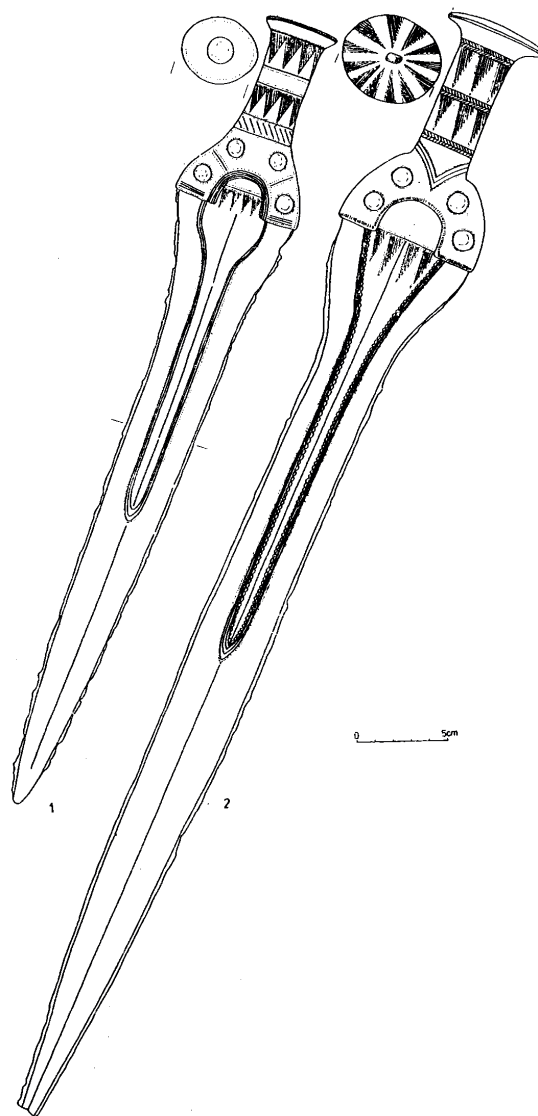


Fig. 3. Bronze swords; treasure from Rożnów, West Pomeranian voivodeship (Poland); 17<sup>th</sup> c. BC [Blajer 1990, table XCII ]

of the elite evolution (e.g. Early Mykene Culture – 17<sup>th</sup> – 15<sup>th</sup> c. BC [Lewartowski 1999: 59]. It was therefore used to legitimize power [Sztompka 2002: 374]. It appears when it is not the fire power that is important but the outward sign, distinguishability of a warrior, his status or his membership to a particular group (e.g. a brotherhood). An interesting matter is also a relatively frequent modification of forms and ornaments, visible especially in the group of swords and axes. Both kinds of artefacts are rightly considered to be very good archaeological determinants, which means that they were, in a sense, determinants of their time. Only the objects of the highest rank (importance) among the people of a particular society are characterised by such variability. History provides many examples of invariable, common objects, as well as those for which trends and a social demand are important factors leading to a change. It is clear that the

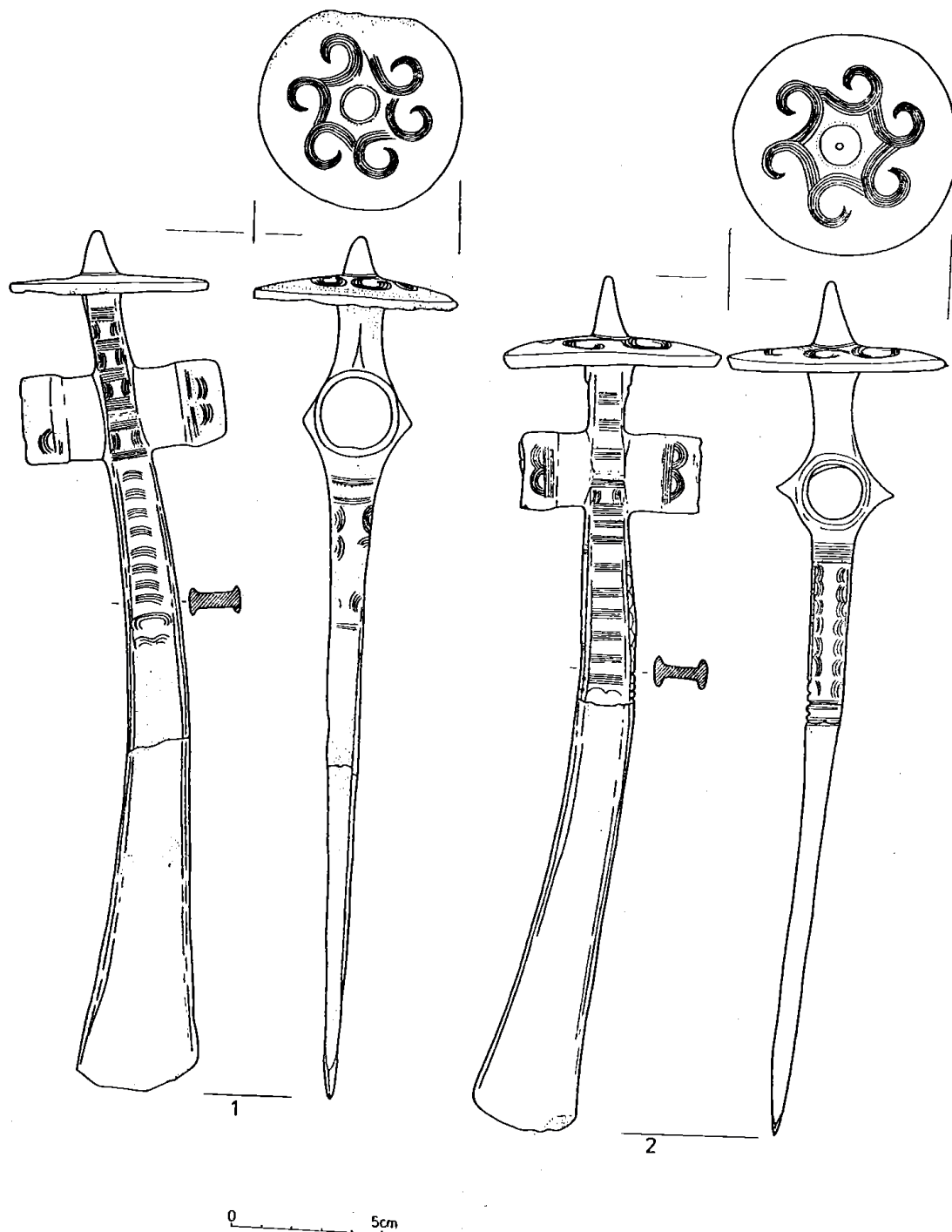


Fig. 4. Bronze shaft-hole axe; treasure from Stefkowa, Podkarpackie voivodeship (Poland), 14<sup>th</sup> c. BC [Blajer 1990, table CVII]

variability is in different cultures concerned with different factors, important from the point of view of a particular society and it very rarely evolves spontaneously [Sztompka 2002: 274].

The tendency to decorate weapon is known also from the later periods. For the Eastern Scythians (7<sup>th</sup> – 4<sup>th</sup> c. BC) it manifested itself in the gold (so evidently ceremonial) artefacts, richly decorated with figural motifs. Among them it is worth to distinguish especially the grips of the acinaci (short swords) and sheaths made of gold plate. Rich

ornaments made of this material appear also on the quiver as well as on the harness. Among the artefacts of the western Celts (5<sup>th</sup> – 1<sup>st</sup> c. BC) we can find many examples of true decorative art (including the narrative art), thanks to which the swords with metal sheaths, as well as spear heads and elements of armour (e.g. helmets) were very richly decorated [Megaw 1996: 110-112, 126, 130-135].

Prehistoric weapons, just as any material objects, played a 'dual role'. In addition to items that were simple, but effective in combat, there occurred

the outstanding examples characterised above. They are evident media of symbolic content, sometimes even not being properly adapted to perform their nominal function. It corresponds to one of the situations known and studied by ethnologists, according to whom each object serves as a sign, a kind of media of information [Dant 2007: 31]. It is more than evident in the particular instances of prehistoric weapon, but also in that of the historic times. We can for example compare here a plain medieval iron sword with 'the Szczerbiec sword', coronation sword from the 13<sup>th</sup> century [Nadolski 1984: 63-65]. In a sense, this tradition is later continued by the swords of the nobility, among which there are beautiful examples of 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> century art that constitute the treasure of museum collections, the others being only the basic tools of war.

Prehistoric societies from Central Europe at the end of the Bronze Age and in the Early Iron Age came into contact with other cultural model than the prototypical one – sedentary farming lifestyle. Quite rapidly and probably with characteristic brutality they were invaded by Eastern European and Asian nomads. From the 9<sup>th</sup> c. BC onwards, these groups appear regularly also in Central Europe as the external aggressors. What attracted them was probably potential plunder, easy to gain in an agricultural, prosperous land. The first people of Eastern European – Asian origin were the Cimmerians, whose presence at the middle Danube is confirmed in the 9<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> c. BC. Another wave consisted of the Scythians (6<sup>th</sup> - 5<sup>th</sup> c. BC), then we note the Huns (4<sup>th</sup> - 5<sup>th</sup> c. AD), in the beginnings of the Middle Ages – the Avars, and a little later – the Magyars (the Hungarians). Most probably, these different groups shared very similar internal organization, referred to as 'military-hierarchical', with numerous social categories, from kings to slaves, with which we are well-acquainted already with regard to the Scythians [Мелюкова 1989: 122-123]. Yet the most important role was played by military aspects. For the whole Scythian society the position of an equestrian warrior, who was able to use the major weapon – the bow – perfectly, was essential. Scythian arrows had characteristic heads made of bronze, of triangular or three-winged section. It is one of the basic components of the military culture of this group. The words of Herodotus imply that it was already in the 5<sup>th</sup> century, since the arrows were used to count all the Scythians: *One of their kings, by name Ariantas, wishing to know the number of his subjects, ordered them all to bring him, on pain of death, the point off one of their arrows. They obeyed; and he collected thereby a vast heap of arrow-heads, which he resolved*

*to form into a memorial that might go down to posterity. Accordingly he made of them this bowl, and dedicated it at Exampaeus [Herodotus, IV]. A bit earlier we find out that the bowl 'holds with ease six hundred amphorae' and it 'is of the thickness of six fingers' breadth.*

Eastern European nomadic tribes were characterised by a complex social structure, which derives from the military position (status of a warrior). It is confirmed e.g. by graves, whose inventories and construction are a very apt reflection of the social diversity. The studies of Jurij Boltrik [2004] show that in the case of late Scythian society (4<sup>th</sup> c. BC) we can even talk about a certain pyramid, with the Scythian rulers at the top. They were buried in graves covered with mounds – barrows. Their grave inventories were characterised by opulence (in terms of both quantity and quality), which was particularly emphasised by golden objects (including military equipment). The cast of senior commanders was buried under smaller mounds and their grave inventories consist of more modest items. The graves of the Scythian aristocracy contain also human sacrifice and, above all, the horses, which were buried with the dead. Later the horses are replaced with the pieces of harness (bits or other elements of head harness). Burials of the ordinary warriors include only the standard elements of contemporary armament.

Ancient Europe at the turn of the eras consists, generally speaking, of two distinct worlds – Mediterranean (Greece-Roman) and barbarian (we use this term according to its contemporary meaning – *Barbaricum* – the area outside the *Imperium Romanum* and, more broadly, outside the territory of Mediterranean civilizations). The differences between the two are substantial, you might even find them fundamental – as there is a developmental difference. In the Greek culture we find an ethos of fighting and a gallant warrior, well represented in the great ancient epics – the Iliad and the Odyssey. These stories had been shaping the attitudes of the Greeks for centuries, with the heroes of Troy as role models. Yet it can be suggested that over time the ethos of the Homeric hero had lost its significance. In the evolving democracy of Athens we will not find a system of values based on the culture of war. Other aspects turned out to be more important – in the Hellenic and Roman world, based on the hierarchical leadership structure, again the crucial role was played by the military matters. A good ruler had to be an effective leader-warrior, of whom both Alexander the Great and Julius Caesar were very good examples.

*Barbaricum* of the ancient Europe in the last ages of the old and the first ages of the new era

consists primarily of the world of the Celts and the Germans. In the Celtic culture, present also in the Polish territories, we can find a group of graves containing the whole sets of armour, which are clearly interpreted as burials of warriors or craftsmen of war. A similar situation can be observed in the Germanic society. Crematory or inhumation graves contain swords, spearheads and elements of armour – iron fittings of shields. The presence of spurs is an evidence for the use of the horse, which, combined with the armour, leads us to the conclusion about the importance of cavalry. War was very important for the Celtic tribes. Written sources directly inform us about multi-directional military expansion of the Celtic tribes, which is best exemplified by the 'Roman episode' with the legend about the geese of the Capitol, 'saving' the Eternal City from the invasion from the north. Example of the Celts also demonstrates that the war is reflected in the pantheon of gods [Birkhan 1996: 634-661], among which we can find gods ensuring fortune in a battle. The cultures of warriors were thus characterised not only by material markers but also by an idiosyncratic world of beliefs and rituals. The need for a greater specialization on the one hand and the contemporary geopolitical situation with a number of conflicts on the other were the causes that led to a kind of professionalization of warriors. From the written sources we can infer that they were frequently forming whole mercenary troops. This applies to e.g. the Celts, who were involved even in the most dangerous and even hopeless tasks (*Kamikaze-Aktionen* [Birkhan 1997: 1038]).

To the Germanic tribes from the last ages of the old and the first ages of the new era, warcraft was also not unknown, especially as they had to resist the power of Rome (and let me add that they did it effectively). For this period of time we also have written accounts (with Tacitus cited above) which describe the armaments and ways of fighting of the Germans. At the same time they inform us about the general way of living, emphasising the simplicity of customs and commitment to a sedentary, farming lifestyle. Weapon and warriors, who, if necessary, consisted of farmers and craftsmen, prove not so much the presence of a 'culture of war', but rather the existence of hazards of the time. Findings of weapon from this period in all Central Europe are numerous. It contributes to the picture of the last centuries of antiquity as a time of unrest and war (which is proved by the written sources), thus prehistory becomes nearly political history [cf. e.g. Kokowski 2005]. It is obvious that groups of warriors and even entire armies play here a major role. We quite frequently encounter offensive (swords, spearheads, axes) as well as defensive

weapon (fittings of shields) in the graves of men. Once again the burial rite serves as a mirror of contemporary culture.

The beginning of the Middle Ages (5<sup>th</sup>/6<sup>th</sup> c.) is marked by the emergence of the Slavic tribes, which soon start to dominate a large part of Central and Eastern Europe. Archaeological sources from the tribal period (5<sup>th</sup>/6<sup>th</sup> – 7<sup>th</sup>/8<sup>th</sup> c.) are devoid of any kinds of weapon. It is consistent with numerous references from the written sources, in which the Slavs are not depicted as warriors. However, when characterizing tribes of the Slavs and the Antes, Procopius of Caesarea (6<sup>th</sup> c.) states: *When they go into battle, they enter it on foot, holding shields and spears, yet they never wear a breastplate. Some have neither a shirt, nor a coat, only long trousers rolled up the leg and in this garment they stand for a fight* [Procopius, *History of the Wars*, 25-26]. Elsewhere he mentions a 'horde' or a 'band' of the Slavs, who harassed the borders of Justinian's state, 'terribly devastating it'. For the Byzantines it was neither sophisticated way of fighting of the Slavs [Grotowski 2005] nor their armament, but rather their size, and perhaps also their own way of fighting, which was foreign to the tradition of Roman-Byzantine (Mediterranean) world. In subsequent ages the Slavic communities were very quickly acculturated, taking over many features of the culture but also those regarding armament and methods of fighting. It was a path that led to the evolution of a uniform culture of medieval Europe with its chivalric ideal mentioned in the introduction. It should be noted, however, that the subculture of the knighthood was developing gradually and it was reserved only for the upper classes.

Our analysis has led us to the following assertions and concluding remarks:

1. As regards the development of prehistoric cultures in Europe it is difficult to speak about a linear model of development of the *militaris* culture. In this respect simple, evolutionary interpretations are definitely not sufficient. Sources and facts recorded by the archaeologists demonstrate that these communities are in various stages of development, surrounded by a variety of external factors (natural and historical). In fact, many of them should be treated as a kind of a closed system. What also varies is our knowledge of the sources (weapons). Even their absence does not necessarily indicate that there were no warriors. The cultural code of warriors is not always manifested in the easiest possible way. Nevertheless we should emphasise the continuity of the meanings and symbols related to weapon and fighting (e.g. an axe, a sword).
2. Among the prehistoric cultures of the Central Europe, especially those with sedentary, stable



lifestyle, associated with agricultural economy, we are dealing with extemporaneous war craft, which was pursued only in certain circumstances. In this light historians perceive the majority of early medieval pre- or even early-state communities in Europe [Modzelewski 2004: 221-230]. At the same time it is important that the armament as well as the social position were related to one's property, conventionally measured by the size of owned land. We can therefore conclude that warriors might have appeared in these cultures, but neither the social structure nor other, non-material factors were associated with the ethos of warrior or fight. Weapon could have been used as manifestation of social position, although in this respect we are dealing with a kind of feedback (social position – armament). Most of the prehistoric cultures of Central Europe are cultures in which warriors (and perhaps not even always) were only present.

3. The other model is characteristic primarily of the nomadic communities, mainly of Eastern European and Asian origin, for whom, to a large extent, war craft was 'a way of life'. We can thus call them 'cultures of warriors'. Both the social structure and financial status (the latter being dependent on the former), as well as rituals and beliefs, were associated with military aspects. In a sense, this refers also to the prehistoric cultures of Central Europe, which preferred mobile livestock farming – e.g. those from the third millennium BC. Pastoral tribes are considered by cultural anthropologists to be more 'warlike' in comparison with farmers, which results from their mobility and a relatively easy source of wealth and, subsequently, from the emerging social differences [Nowicka 1997: 323-324], in which military aspects were highly influential [Szyjewski 2001: 414-415]. It is not accidental that numerous weapons and clearly marked social differences are one of the main determinants of these cultures. In these groups there probably existed separate groups of warriors for whom group identification and universal personal qualities – chivalry and honour were equally important [Вандкилде 2009: 272]. It can therefore be stated that the qualities of a warrior described in the introduction are universal, regardless of geographical and historical conditions. This is why they are important as an element that distinguishes community of warriors, although it is impossible to identify it on the basis of the archaeological material.
4. A prehistoric culture, in order to be considered a community of warriors, must meet several criteria in terms of sources and interpretation. These include:
  - numerous and varied (with regard to both assortment and meaning) findings of weapon and objects related to it (e.g. harness)
  - the presence of weapon in an environment (e.g. a grave) that proves the internal structure of the group of warriors, or even implying the existence of warriors' structures
  - social and ritual function of weapon, certified iconographically or in written sources.

5. We have to keep in mind, however, that archaeology also utilizes other research instruments and groups of findings in terms of *cultura militaris*. Apart from weapon we should also mention defensive architecture, battlefields, traces of fighting recorded in settlements and in human remains, which are found in graves with evident signs of fighting (e.g. a bone with an arrow-head). We can therefore conclude that many prehistoric cultures cannot be understood without taking into consideration the matters signalled in this draft.

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## Prahisteryczne kultury wojowników czy wojownicy prahisterycznych kultur?

**Słowa kluczowe:** archeologia prahisteryczna, broń, wojownik, miecz

### Abstrakt

Zasadniczym problemem jest w niniejszym artykule próba odpowiedzi na pytanie o społeczność wojowników w kulturach prahisterycznych Europy Środkowej. Autor rozpatruje ten problem na gruncie źródeł archeologicznych (materialnych pozostałości dawnych kultur). Posiłkuje się też źródłami pisanymi z epoki późnej starożytności, dochodząc do następujących wniosków:

1. W rozwoju europejskich kultur prahisterycznych trudno mówić o liniowym modelu rozwoju kultury *militaris*. Rejestrowane przez archeologów źródła i fakty pokazują te społeczności na różnym etapie rozwoju i w otoczeniu rozmaitych uwarunkowań zewnętrznych (naturalnych i historycznych). W zasadzie wiele z nich należałoby traktować jako swego rodzaju układy (systemy) zamknięte. Różny jest też stan znajomości źródeł (broni). Nawet ich brak nie musi wcale jednoznacznie wskazywać na nieobecność wojowników. Kulturowy kod wojowników nie zawsze manifestuje się w najprostszy sposób. Należy jednak podkreślić ciągłość znaczeń i symboli związanych z bronią i walką (np. topór, miecz).
2. W środkowoeuropejskich kulturach prahisterycznych, przede wszystkim tych o osiadłym, stabilnym trybie życia, związanym z gospodarką rolniczą (uprawową) mamy raczej do czynienia z doraźnym rzemiosłem wojennym, którym zajmowano się w razie potrzeby lub w zaistniałych okoliczności. Ważne jest przy tym, że zarówno zróżnicowane uzbrojenie, jak i tym samym pozycja, były pochodną stanu posiadania mierzonego wielkością własności osobistej lub rodowej. Można zatem powiedzieć, że były to kultury w których mogli funkcjonować wojownicy, ale ani struktura społeczna, ani inne, pozamaterialne jej przejawy nie były związane z etosem walki czy wojownika. Broń mogła jednak służyć jako wyróżnik podkreślający pozycję społeczną, choć w tym zakresie mamy do czynienia ze swego rodzaju sprzężeniem zwrotnym (pozycja społeczna – uzbrojenie). Większość prahisterycznych kultur środkowoeuropejskich to kultury, w których tylko (i to zapewne nie zawsze) obecni byli wojownicy.
3. Z odmiennym modelem mamy do czynienia przede wszystkim w społecznościach pasterskich (koczowniczych), głównie pochodzenia wschodnioeuropejskiego i azjatyckiego. Rzemiosło wojenne było wśród nich w dużej mierze „sposobem na życie”. Możemy zatem je określać umownie jako „kultury wojowników”. Zarówno struktura społeczna, jak i zależny od niej status materialny, a także obyczaje i wierzenia, wiązały się z aspektami militarnymi. W pewnym sensie można to odnosić także do środkowoeuropejskich kultur prahisterycznych, preferujących mobilną gospodarkę hodowlaną – np.

tych z III tys. BC. Plemiona pasterskie są uważane przez antropologów kulturowych za bardziej wojownicze w porównaniu z rolnikami, co wynika z ich mobilności i relatywnie łatwego źródła bogactwa, a w dalszej kolejności, powstających różnic społecznych, w których istotną rolę odgrywały właśnie aspekty militarne.

4. Kultury prahistoryczne, aby mogły być zaliczone do ugrupowań wojowników, muszą spełnić kilka kryteriów źródłowych i interpretacyjnych. Należą do nich:

- odpowiednio liczne i zróżnicowane (asortymentowo i znaczeniowo) znaleziska broni oraz przedmiotów z nią związanych (np. oporządzenie jeździeckie);
- występowanie broni w kontekstach (np. grobach) świadczących o wewnętrznym zróżnicowaniu grupy

wojowników, a nawet pozwalających stwierdzić istnienie struktur wojowników;

- społeczna i rytualna funkcja broni, potwierdzona ikonograficznie lub w źródłach pisanych.

5. Należy także pamiętać, że archeologia dysponuje jeszcze innymi instrumentami badawczymi i grupami znalezisk z grupy *cultura militaris*. Poza scharakteryzowaną tu bronią należy wymienić wszelkie konstrukcje obronne, pola bitew, ślady walk rejestrowane w badanych osadach i grodach czy też szczątki ludzkie, znajdowane w grobach z ewidentnymi pozostałościami walki (np. kość z tkwiącym w niej grotem). Można zatem stwierdzić, że wielu kultur prahistorycznych nie sposób zrozumieć bez uwzględnienia zasygnalizowanych w niniejszym szkicu problemów.