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Violent Raiding, Systematic Slaving, and Sweeping Depopulation? Re-Evaluating the Scythian Impact on Central Europe through the Lens of the Witaszkowo/Vettersfelde Hoard

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Abstract: In 1882, the lavishly decorated golden regalia of a steppe nomad warrior prince, which was crafted in the late sixth century BCE in a “bilingual” Scythian–Milesian workshop on the Black Sea coast, was found on the edge of a Lusatian swamp 120 km southeast of Berlin. Its discovery and the ongoing findings of steppe nomad armaments—arrows, battle axes, and swords—in central Europe have led to a lively debate about the nature of Scythian–Indigenous interaction in the Early Iron Age, ranging from benign visions of long-term acculturation to violent scenarios of short-term raiding. In this article, I argue that an analysis of the iconography of the Witaszkowo hoard and new information from excavations at its find spot make it likely that it was sent as a diplomatic gift by Scythian elites to an indigenous leader and deposited by the local community as a votive hoard. An affirmation of the compact chronological range of Scythian artefacts found in the west, growing evidence for the destruction of indigenous strongholds by horse-borne archers, and concurrent evidence for the drastic depopulation of vast landscapes in the second half of the sixth century BCE allow us to envisage the gifting of this hoard as an episode of a fierce and destructive altercation. It is posited that this onslaught was a facet of the western thrust of the Lydian and Persian Empires, and that its extirpative impact was the result of systematic, commercially driven slaving triggered by the concurrent monetisation of the economies of the Black Sea coast. The effects of these raids on Eastern Central Europe’s later prehistoric communities are made manifest by analogies to the disastrous ramifications of the transatlantic slave trade on societies of 16th-to-18th-century West Africa.

Keywords: Scythian; treasure; Vettersfelde/Witaszkowo; animal art; raiding; colonization; monetisation; Milesians; slaving; depopulation



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“A stray ray of light from a sunny land, whose quivering end falls in the vast barren void of a dark cave—a fiery comet which emerges from a far-off sphere onto the dark sky with glistening tail—thus the gold find from Vettersfelde stands apart from the gloomy fog of its vast prehistoric environs.”

(Furtwängler 1883, p. 1)

1. Vettersfelde/Witaszkowo, 1882

1.1. *A Dazzling Fish in a Soggy Field, a Visionary Scholar, and a Tenacious Narrative*

The Scythian¹ gold hoard found in 1882 near Lower Lusatian Vettersfelde, now Witaszkowo, Lubusz province (Poland), is arguably the most spectacular and exotic find of the central European Early Iron Age (Greifenhagen 1982; Nebelsick 2014, 2022; Topal 2022). It was found on 5 October 1882, by the farmer Adolf Lauschke while he was draining his soggy field. Through the intervention of Prince Heinrich zu Schoenaich-Carolath, all of the larger objects were secured by the Berlin Museum and published one year later in a visionary essay by the leading archaeologist of the day, Adolf Furtwängler (Furtwängler 1883). In his publication, Furtwängler cautiously proposed a connection between the deposition of this treasure just over 100 kilometres from Germany’s capital and Scythian forces fleeing

westwards from Darius' Pontic offensive in 513/512 BCE. He thought that the treasure came from their deceased leader's princely grave. His vision set the agenda for the historicising narratives of the subsequent century seeking to explain the Vettersfelde treasure. Reacting to the hoard's discovery, his disciple, Paul Reinecke, began systematically compiling Scythian finds in Central Europe. He and his followers developed the vision of a devastating Scythian raid in the shadow of the Persian wars, which reached westwards into Lusatia. These narratives, in which the purported chieftain's grave at Witaszkowo/Vettersfelde inevitably looms large, dovetailed with "völkisch"-charged visions of Europe's distant history as a sequence of conflicts between antagonistic racially distinct peoples vying for European predominance. In a clear break from this interpretative pattern, scholars since the 1990s have seen the appearance of Scythica in Eastern Central Europe as an aspect of long-term interactions with nomads of the Eurasian steppe, reaching back into the Late Bronze Age. These long-term contacts led, they proposed, to different degrees of acculturation and integration of steppe artefacts and lifeways in the west. Favouring more martial interpretation, other scholars adopted a long chronology, seeing the deposition of the Witaszkowo hoard in the late sixth century as the final act of a conflict that had been initiated more than a century previously (for references, see [Nebelsick 2014](#), pp. 68–69). This article considers the results of new iconographic and technical investigations of the golden artefacts and information from new excavations at the site of the Witaszkowo hoard. It also reflects innovative research that has been published in the last few decades, proposing a tighter temporal focus on Scythian incursions into the west and adding to the evidence of these raid's destructive impact and the resulting cultural and physical collapse of indigenous communities. Moreover, it also seeks to contextualise Scythian expansion to the west in the political upheavals affecting the Pontic region in the sixth century BCE and relate the disastrous consequences of this onslaught to the emergence of commercially driven slaving.

1.2. The Composition/Reconstruction of the Hoard

Thanks to Furtwängler's scrupulous account and the meticulous research by Berlin-based and local prehistorians, who were able to describe pendants and jewellery—most of which had been dispersed and melted down soon after the hoard's discovery—it is possible to offer a coherent interpretative account of the composition of the hoard (Figure 1).



Figure 1. Vettersfelde/Witaszkowo hoard: reconstruction of the hoard (modified and expanded after [Furtwängler 1883](#)).

1.3. The Warrior's Beauty, Golden Gorytyos and Akinakes (cf. Figures 2 and 3)

This hoard's spectacular weapon set was once strapped onto its elite wearer's belt (Rolle et al. 1991, p. 427). It is highly likely, that the 41 cm long, richly decorated golden fish-shaped mount and cloverleaf phalera (Figures 2–5) adorned a Scythian bow and quiver case/gorytyos (Redfern 2000, p. 416f.; Babenko 2023, pp. 248–51). Gorytyi with golden mounts embossed with animal art are a characteristic feature of ostentatious north Pontic sixth–fifth-century BCE grave assemblages (Figure 2(2,3), Alekseev 2014), and contemporary, anthropomorphic stelae show quivers decorated with large, vertically mounted animal motifs (Figure 2(4), Ol'hovskij and Evdokimov 1994).



Figure 2. The reconstruction of the Witaszkowo gorytyos compared to other figured gorytyos mounts. (1)—Gorytyos mounts from Witaszkowo/Vettersfelde (after Furtwängler 1883); (2)—quiver mount from Illicheve, Kurhan I, Grave 6, Lenine Raion, Crimea, Ukraine, ca 525–475 BCE (after Reeder 1999); (3)—golden gorytyos mount, Zolotoj Kurhan near Simferopol, Crimea, Ukraine, late 6th century BCE (Artamonov and Formann 1970); (4)—anthropomorphic stela from the Man'icskaja Stanica, Yaroslavl Oblast, Russia, showing a figured gorytyos, possibly 7th—early 6th century BCE (after Ol'hovskij and Evdokimov 1994).

A sheet-gold strap mount that was ploughed up in 1914 (Figure 1) has a cloverleaf finial that mirrors the form of the phalera and can be related to cruciform Scythian mounts for fastening gorytyi to warriors' belts (Ratzel 1978; Hellmuth 2007b; Kemenczei 1986, 2009, pl. 118,5). Thus, the Witaszkowo gorytyos can be reconstructed with the phalera on the top flap and the great fish mounted vertically on the gorytyos body, with a gold-plated strap fastening it to the warrior's belt. It is also possible that the foxtail chain and its pendants may have dangled from it.

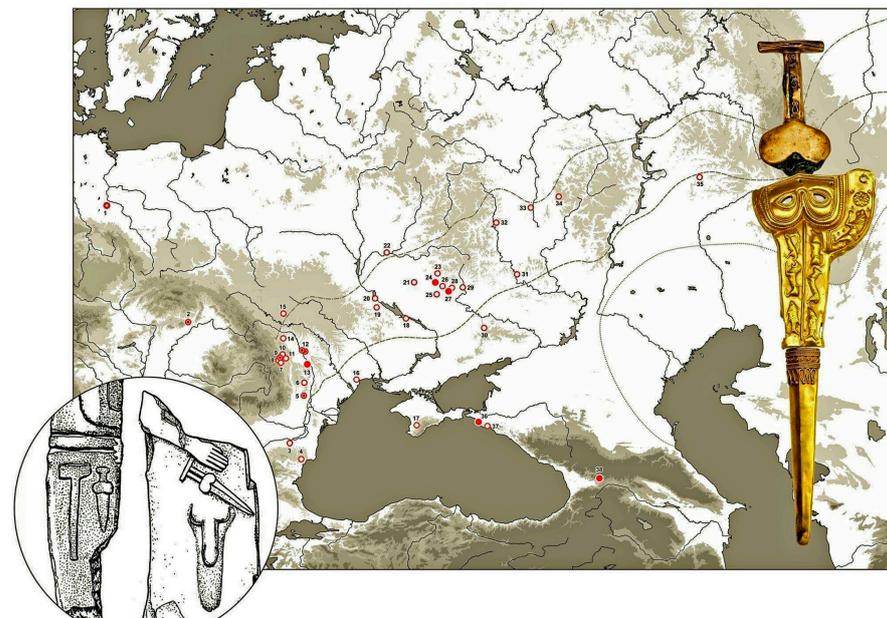


Figure 3. Witaszkowo akinakes and related short swords: (1)—Witaszkowo akinakes and whetstone. (after [Furtwängler 1883](#)); (2)—gold-plated akinakes from Chutor Shumejko, near Vovkivtsi, Sumy Oblast, Ukraine (after [Ginters 1928](#)); (3)—gold-plated akinakes from Ołeksandrivka, Kurhan 6/1, Dnipro Oblast, Ukraine (after [Murzin and Skory 1994](#)); (4)—gold-plated akinake from Tomakiv'ka, Dnipro Oblast, Ukraine (after [Ginters 1928](#)); Below—map of type Vetersfelde daggers (after [Topal 2016](#)).

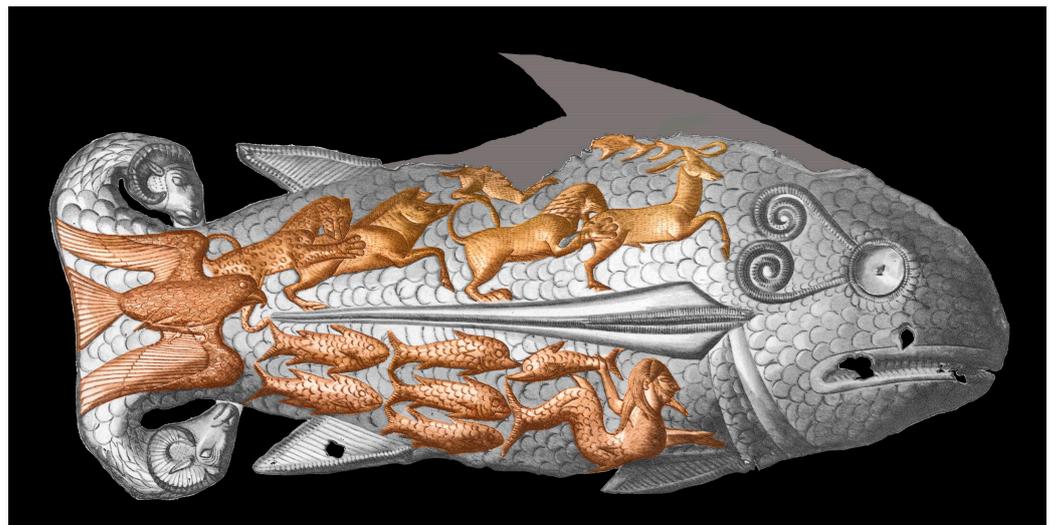


Figure 4. Witaszkowo hoard, fish with highlighted inscribed animals (after Furtwängler 1883).



Figure 5. Witaszkowo hoard: clover leaf phalera (gorytos flap mount) with animal chase and combat scenes. (modified after Furtwängler 1883).

Denis Topal assigns the Witaszkowo sword (Figure 3(1)) to his “Vettersfelde” variant of daggers with T-shaped pommels and heart-shaped guards (Topal 2018, 2019, 2022). They were widely used in the north Pontic steppes during the early sixth century BCE, with a distribution focus in the Northeastern Carpathian piedmont. Interestingly, the Witaszkowo sword’s narrow chape and its filigree décor place it on the transition between the older and younger “ceremonial swords” (Figure 3; see Ginters 1928; Shelekhan 2020, p. 82, fig. 3,8), which is best dated to the second quarter-to-mid-sixth century. Remarkably, the Ionic figuration embossed on this sword’s sheath is at least a generation younger. This suggests that, like the fifth-century BCE Persian golden hilt overlay grafted onto a fourth-century BCE blade and inserted into a sheath decorated with a sophisticated Hellenistic battle scene from the Chertomlyk Kurhan (Treister 2010, pp. 227–29; Meyer 2013, pp. 224–28), the goldsmith who decorated the Witaszkowo sword had hybridized and updated an heirloom. Perhaps this reflected the specific biography of the weapon and the fate of its owners. In this context, it is worth noting that curating and gifting heirlooms was a strategy for legitimising authority used by nobles of the Persian court (Henkelman 2018, pp. 811–12).

The gold-socketed pendant whetstone (Figure 2(1)) also belongs to the conspicuous attire of an elite steppe warrior (Ježek 2020).

1.4. The Iconography of Hierarchy and Order

The figurative program of the golden gorytos (Figure 2(2), Figures 4 and 5) and akinakes mounts (Figure 3(1)) illustrates and legitimises the high status of their bearer. The hunting and animal combat scenes on the upper register of the gorytos and akinakes-mounts celebrate martial force and natural hierarchies (Meuli 1954; Eliade 1972, pp. 158–60), which play a vital role in the heraldry of power in the Near East (Strawn 2005; Watanabe 2002; Otto 2013) and Archaic Greece (Hölscher 1972; von Hofsten 2007; Winkler-Horaček 2015), as well as Persia (Kuz'mina 1987; Root 2002; Sathe 2012), Central Asia (Silvi Antonini 2003), and Eastern Europe (Kull 2000, p. 433f.; Nebelsick 2014, p. 52, fig. 2.23; Topal 2022). Predators that served as universal metaphors of power also specifically mirrored the lifeways and ideals of rulers and warriors of the steppes. Interestingly, it is not only the animal predators that are hunting on the fish-shaped mount (Figure 4). Nereus/Triton, who usually holds a wreath or even an octopus in his extended hand (Cevizoğlu 2010, pl. 49; Yphantidēs 1990, p. 178, no. 119), is shown smiting, using a dolphin as a club, and with his empty hand pointing forwards, a pose adopted by hunters on late sixth-century BCE Milesian Fikellura pottery (Wascheck 2008, p. 64, fig. 20).

The syntax of the animal combat on the cloverleaf phalera also illustrates the “natural order” of predator–prey relations (Figure 5) by showing an intricately graded hierarchy of confrontation and chase between selected carnivores and herbivores. Lion and aurochs, both apex animals and symbols of royalty, attack each other as antagonistic equals. The image of lion–bull combat has a long history in the Middle East, where it not only justified royal authority (Morgan 2017) but also had cosmological ramifications combining and unifying nature’s apex forces (Hartner and Ettinghausen 1964; Root 2002, pp. 201–3). In a descending scale of confrontation on phalera and sword sheath, a lion chases a swift stag; the lesser panther faces a combative wild boar, a rustic wolf confronts a ram, and, finally, a small fox races after a hare. The opposed stag–lion/bull–lion coupling on the two upper disks of the phalera was probably also an empowering element. Their disposition can be compared to the lion felling a boar and a second lion mauling a stag in the spandrels flanking the triumphal epiphany of the godly archer Apollo on the eastern gable of the late sixth-century BCE Apollonion at Delphi (Knell 1990, pp. 46–48), a fitting imagery for an elite bowman.

On the gorytos, the outstretched talons of the eagle, swooping above the fish’s tail, are poised to grasp both the hare, racing below the upper fin and the fish and dolphin, plunging through the lower register (Figure 6). Fish, and sometimes dolphins, are the eagle’s prey in the sixth- and fifth-century BCE Scythian figurative art (Michel 1995, p. 55; Polidovych and Malyuk 2016, pp. 212–14; Kantorovich 2018). The fantastic dolphin variant, which features on the coinage of Greek Pontic colonies, may reflect a lost founding mythology involving monstrous ospreys grasping these marine mammals (Panait-Bîrzescu 2020; Vlassova 2001, p. 85, fig. 21). The hare is a more conventional victim of Eurasian raptors (Babenko 2017). Hare-hunting Scythian eagles (Artamonov and Formann 1970, pl. 118) reflect both Greek (Simon and Hirmer 1976, p. 64f.) and Anatolian images (Young 1981, p. 34, fig. 13; Prayon 1987, pl. 25–26) with roots reaching back into the Late Bronze Age (Canby 2002). Yet it is only in compositions on metalwork from the lower Danube that these masters of the three elements hunt both fish and hare simultaneously (Figure 6; Schneider and Zazoff 1994, pp. 200–2; Zazoff 1996, p. 169f.; Kull 2000, p. 434). This is just one of the many parallels between the iconography and syntax employed by fifth-century BCE lower Danubian silversmiths and the workshop that produced the Witaszkowo treasures (Kull 2000, p. 433f.).

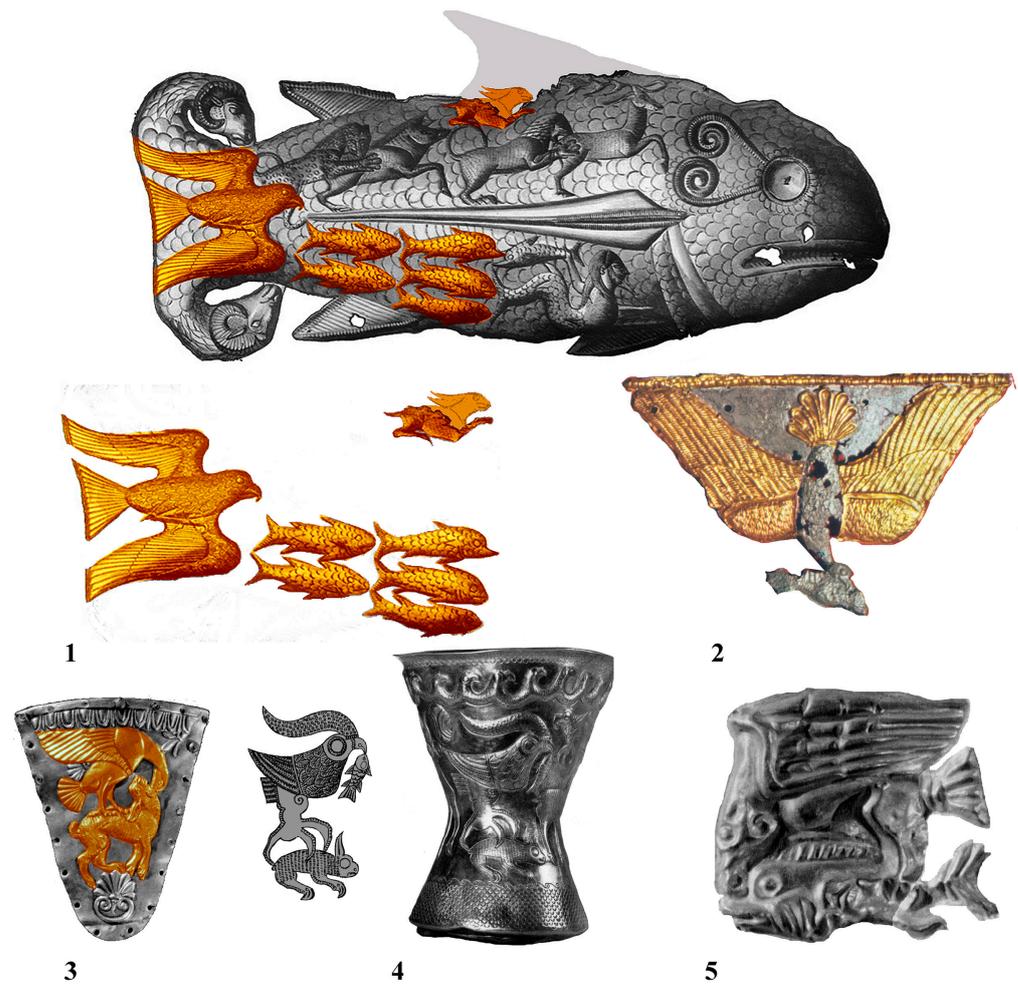


Figure 6. (1)—Vettersfelde find fish with the eagle and his prey highlighted (after [Furtwängler 1883](#)) (2)—eagle grasps a fish; segment of a gilded gorytos mount from Stanica Varennikovskaja, Krasnodar region, Russia Seven Brothers Kurhan 2, mid-fifth century BCE (after [Artamonov and Formann 1970](#)). (3)—golden mount from a wooden vessel or drinking horn with highlighted scene of an eagle savaging a hare. Stanica Varennikovskaja, Krasnodar region, Russia, Seven Brothers Kurhan 4, early fifth century BCE (after [Artamonov and Formann 1970](#)). (4)—horned eagle grasps a hare and pecks a fish. Beaker Agighiol, jud. Tulcea, mid-fourth century (after [Venedikov and Gerassimov 1973](#)). (5)—eagle grasps a dolphin. Detail of a drinking horn mount from Elizavetinskaja Stanica Kurhan 9, Rayon Krasnodar region, turn of the fifth-to-fourth century BCE (after [Artamonov and Formann 1970](#)).

The iconography of the fish's decor reflects cosmological order ([Michel 1995](#), pp. 78–81). Water is evoked by the gigantic fish mount itself and, of course, the merman (Nereus or Triton) and his entourage in its lower register (see [Ahlberg-Cornell 1984](#)). Animal combat and the hare's flight on the fish's upper register occur on land. Heaven is home to the omnipotent eagle who threatens both the land-based hare and the submerged fish (Figure 6). Earth and water are also suggested by the fish lying beneath the hunting lions on the akinakes' sheath. The animal combat scene on the stylistically closely related golden gorytos/quiver overlay from Illicheve Kurhan 1 in Crimea, Ukraine ([Reeder 1999](#), pp. 160–62, no. 50), which shows an eagle alighting on a stag being felled by a chthonic serpent, may be telling a similar story (Figure 2(2)). A Hellenistic version of this motif combination is shown on the golden scabbard from the early fourth-century BCE ostentatious grave of Kul-Oba ([Artamonov and Formann 1970](#), p. 172, pl. 208–9), which has confronted eagle heads at its mouth, animal combat on its sheath, and a hippocamp on its flap. It is tempting to compare this iconography with the Persians' demand for earth and water as a demonstration of fealty during their Western campaigns ([Kuhrt 1988](#), p. 88f.).

1.5. Power, Immortality and Legitimacy, the Hoard's Heraklean Imagery

Persistent allusions to Herakles complement this celebration of predatorial violence and hierarchy. The eyes that decorate the top of the akinakes' sheath (Figure 3(1)) are a case in point. Their slightly arched lids and deep-swung lower contours recall contemporary feline imagery. Their sagging shape indicates that a scalp is being shown, evoking associations with Herakles' ubiquitous cloak, the impenetrable fell of the Nemean Lion. Interestingly, the golden chape of an early fourth-century BCE akinakes from the Solocha Kurhan also shows a flattened lion's snout with sagging eyes (Topal 2021b, p. 52, fig. 4(3)). While Herakles universally uses the lion's scalp as a hood in Attic vase painting (Cohen 1998), a late sixth-century BCE Chiote vase shows the scalp resting on Herakles' abdomen, just above his sword, suggesting that the lion's scalp crowning the Witaszkowo akinakes sheath may be echoing Ionian imagery (Lemos 1991, p. 276f., p. 741, fig. 59).

The merman on the great gorytos mount, be he Nereus or Triton, can be seen as a further reference to Greece's favourite hero. Herakles wrestling Nereus, and later, Triton, is the most popular of his feats shown on Attic pottery of the second half of the sixth century BCE (Ahlberg-Cornell 1984). The great fish itself can be seen as a reference to a further Heraklean triumph. The best parallel for both its iconography and its style is found on a late sixth-century BCE Attic black-figure cup from Taranto's Archaic cemetery, showing Herakles saving princess Hesione from the huge ketos, the Greek mythological whale, on the beach of Troy (Figure 7(2); Boardman 1987, esp. 80 no. 49; Papadopoulos and Ruscillo 2002). Like our great fish, the Tarantine monster has a large mouth with serrated teeth, an all-over scaled body, bent-back tail fins, and a great gryphon curl dangling behind its eye. "Gryphon curls" are monster attributes with a long Near Eastern pedigree (Figure 7(5,6); Akurgal 1992) and entered the Graeco-Scythian repertoire in the late seventh century BCE (Alekseev 2012, p. 102f., pp. 108–11).

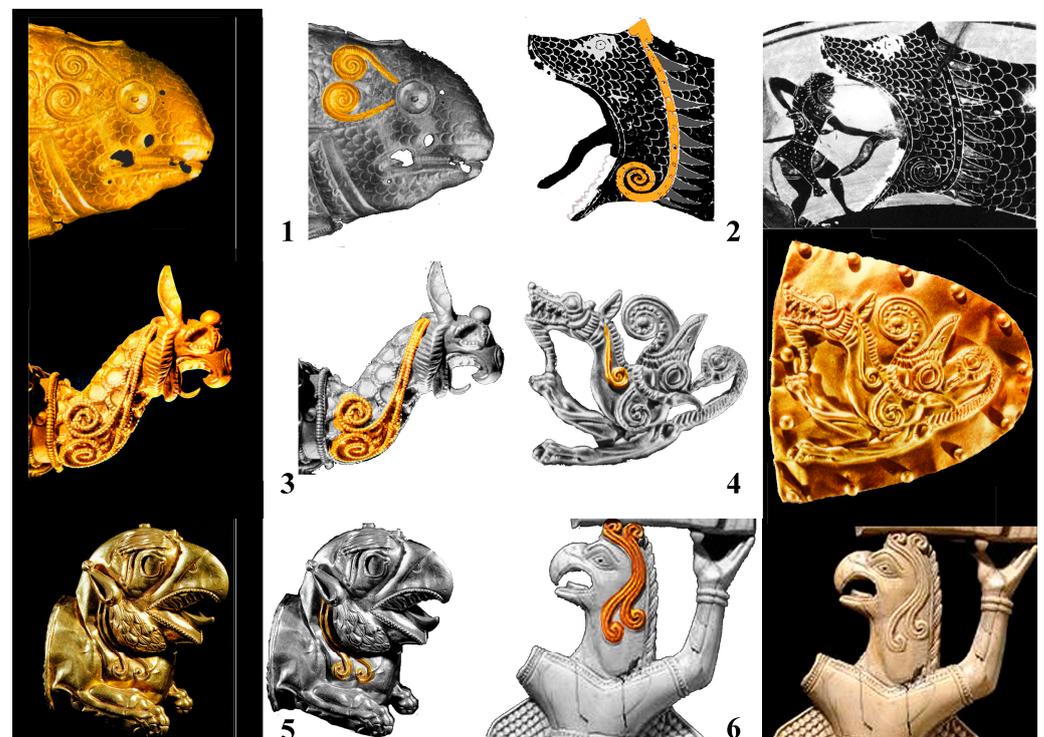


Figure 7. Gryphon Curls: (1)—Witaszkowo hoard, gorytos mount, Ketos with highlighted gryphon curls (after Furtwängler 1883); (2)—the Trojan Ketos with rudimentary gryphon curl subdued by Heracles; Attic black-figure kylix signed by Lydos; Taranto, Via Federico Di Palma, Grave 3, 550–540 BCE (Taranto 52155, after Boardman 1987, fig. 179); (3)—gryphon protome on the gold diadem from

Kelermes, Republic of Adigea, Russia, Kurhan Schulz 3, with highlighted curls, early 6th century (Artamonov and Formann 1970, pl. 26); (4)—Simurgh with gryphon curl, golden mount probably from a wooden vessel, Varennikovskaya Stanitsa, Krasnodar region, Russia, Seven Brothers Kurhan 4, first half of the 5th century BCE (after Artamonov and Formann 1970, pl. 121); (5)—gryphon protome with highlighted curl from the “Treasure of Ziwiyé”, Persian Kurdistan, possibly a princely tomb, late-eighth—early-seventh century BCE (after Godard 1950, fig. 1); (6)—eagle-headed demon with highlighted curls. Ivory furniture (throne?) fitting, Toprakkale, Turkish-Kurdistan, late eighth century BCE (after Collon 1995, fig. 132).

Thus, the bearer of the Witaszkowo panoply embodied three strands of Heraklean triumph over certain death: strangling the unwoundable Nemean Lion, disemboweling the invincible Trojan Ketos, and wrestling down the immortal merman Triton/Nereus—allowing him to bind his fate to that of the immortal bowman (Brommer 1972, pp. 39–41; Cohen 1994). Moreover, a panoply with Heraklean imagery would also have evoked narratives that reinforced the identity and legitimacy of its bearer in the eyes of its Scythian beholders, as Herakles famously sired their mythical eponym ancestor Skythes during his Pontic wanderings (Raevskiy 1977; Hinge 2008; Lincoln 2014). Entangling Scythian and Greek strands of Herakles’ myths and imagery would also have reinforced the propriety of the Scythian/Ionian symbiosis, which was the basis of the success of Miletus’ Pontic apokiai (Braund 2021).

2. Jewellery and Pendants between Attributes of Power, Amulets, and Tassels

2.1. Neck- and Arm-Ring (cf. Figures 1 and 8–11)

While the Witaszkowo hoard’s ostentatious weapons and their iconography can easily be understood as attributes and allegories amplifying the fame of an elite steppian warrior, it is more difficult to understand the role of the jewellery in these martial regalia. Golden neck rings (Figures 1 and 8) are, however, a salient feature of Scythian ostentatious male costume and denote their bearer’s high status (Klochko 1997; Ol’hovskij and Evdokimov 1994, p. 68f.; Čugunov et al. 2010, pp. 311–12). Arm rings (Figures 1, 9 and 10) also regularly complement the costumes of the steppe elite (Bukowski 1977, p. 156f.). However, snake-head arm rings, like the one that survived at Witaszkowo, are usually found in female contexts and only rarely accompany elite male burials; for instance, Stična, Slovenia, grave 48/33 (Gabrovec et al. 2006, pl. 25,2).

Crucial evidence for interpreting the presence of the golden neck- and fire-damaged arm ring (perhaps there were originally two) in the Witaszkowo hoard comes from the ostentatious warrior late fifth-century BCE grave Filippovka Kurhan 4, Grave 4 in the Southern Urals. The young man in this grave, who was furnished with an akinakes, wore an Achaemenid golden torque and two golden arm rings with animal finials. Along with a silver amphora, they are likely to have been a diplomatic present from a member of the Persian court gifted during the late fifth century BCE (Yablonsky 2010, pp. 138–40).

2.2. Earring, Pendants, and a Foxtail Chain

Interestingly, a new find illustrates that the earring and the two miniature, socketed stone pendants from the Witaszkowo pendant repertoire (Figures 1, 11 and 12) likely belong to a warrior’s outfit. Grave goods recovered in 2019 from the early-to-mid-sixth century BCE secondary burial of a young male in Kurhan 377/1 at the large polycultural cemetery at Mamai-Hora (Andruh and Toshev 2000; Hellmuth 2006c) near Zaporizhzhia in Ukraine (Andruh and Toshev 2022a, 2022b), which lay on the edge of a wholly plundered, large, central grave, 377/2, include an akinakes-type Vetersfelde with a gilded Persian filigree-decorated hilt and chape, a battle axe, a whetstone, horse gear, and an arrow set (gorytos) that hung from his belt (Figure 13). Remarkably, the costume also included a golden earring with a lozenge-shaped body, which, while it is highly similar to the Witaszkowo example, stylistically predates it, and a miniature stone-axe pendant with a golden socket, both found near the head of the deceased. This abbreviated jewellery set prefigures the

Witaszkowo jewellery assemblage exactly. Further evidence for related golden jewellery from ostentatious graves includes a golden earring with a conical pendant from Grave 23 at the seventh-century BCE Nižnjego Povolž'ja site on the lower Volga (Hellmuth 2010, p. 560f., pl. 149) and a gold-socketed miniature stone axe with early sixth-century BCE filigree, which was integrated into a late fifth-century BCE necklace from a female burial in Yablunivka kurhan 2 near Kharkiv, Ukraine (Onajko 1966, p. 64, no. 227, pl. 23,1). These complex pendants, worn near the head, are best understood as amulets. From a Western perspective, bejewelled warriors seem exotic (Hellmuth Kramberger 2017b). Yet it is worth noting that pendant earrings were worn by seventh–sixth-century BCE warriors in Central Asia (Demidenko and Firsov 2007, p. 173f.), while fifth-century BCE images of Persian rulers, nobles, and imperial guards show that, like the Mesopotamian nobility (Hrouda 1965, esp. pl. 8) before them, they wore both open arm-rings, some with animal head finials, and earrings (Rehm 1992, pp. 13–47, 139–54).

Lauschke had dismembered the thick foxtail chain, with its spacers, thin, tassel-like chain segments, and rhombic pendants immediately after its discovery. Most of the smaller elements were gifted or sold, making its reconstruction tentative and interpretation difficult (Figure 1(20)). While loop-in-loop chains (Reist Stark and Reist Smith 1999) are a characteristic feature of late Scythian women's jewelry in North Pontic Scythia and Macedonia (Figure 10(5) and Figure 8, Artamonov and Formann 1970, pl. 133; Vokotopoulou 1985), there is tantalizing evidence for foxtail chains, with multi-component ornaments in male-denoted contexts (Figure 8). The golden fox tail chain from Hungarian Zöldhalompuszta, for instance, was found together with a golden gorytos mount. It was not only decorated with spacers but also accompanied by a small, hollow, trapezoidal golden pendant, which may have served as a socket for a stone or bead (Kemenczei 1999, p. 169, fig. 3). The complex, three-strand, tasseled, golden foxtail chain from an ostentatious secondary grave in the late seventh-century BCE Litoj/Mel'gunovsky Kurhan (near Kirovograd Ukraine) (Tunkina 2007; Alekseev 2012, p. 114f.) was found together with a gold-sheathed akinakes, golden eagle-shaped gorytos plaques, a set of arrows, and, remarkably, furniture mounts, probably from an Assyrian throne (Boltryk and Fialko 2019). Finally, the braided golden strap from the hidden cache in the Bratoliubivskyi Kurhan (near Kherson, Ukraine) should be mentioned. It is decorated with plastically modeled horse head finials decorated with Middle Scythian teardrop filigree. It was once also adorned by a wreath of pendants worn or torn off before its deposition. Its manufacturing may date to the late sixth century BCE, but it was deposited about a century later with a conical gorytos mount, a phiale, and two rhyta (Reeder 1999, pp. 272–81, no. 135). In this context, it is worth noting that complex, seemingly golden chain-and-tassel assemblages dangle from the quivers of fifth-century BCE images of Persian elite warriors (Figure 9) on the polychrome brick reliefs from Susa (Dieulafoy 1890, p. 281, fig. 154, p. 155, pl. 5–7), the bas reliefs from Persepolis (Roaf 1983, p. 11, fig. 4), and, occasionally, on fifth-century BCE Persian seals (Dandamaev 1976, pl. 15).

These analogies make it clear that what Adolf Lauschke ploughed up from his soggy field was no random assemblage of golden mounts and ornaments, but the coherent and almost complete golden regalia made for a member of the North Pontic Scythian nobility.

2.3. Who Made the Treasure and Where?

What is immediately apparent is that the Witaszkowo golden regalia, most if not all of which was made as a unified set in a single workshop (Redfern 2000), was not the work of a top-end Ionian master jeweller who was catering to Pontic elites during the late sixth/early fifth century BCE (Deppert-Lippitz 1996). Defects, like the unfinished border of the fish mount's lower front fin, the roughly sketched beasts on the phalera, the sloppy hook that serves as the back leg and three-fingered paw of the fish mount's panther, and, above all, the fact that only two of the four legs of all the animals are shown, point to the work of a less gifted craftsman from the provinces. So, too, do the iconographic slips, like forgetting the notch in the merman's tail (see Icard-Gianolio 1997), but above all, equipping the Witaszkowo dolphins with fish scales, a gaffe unparalleled in contemporary Greek art.

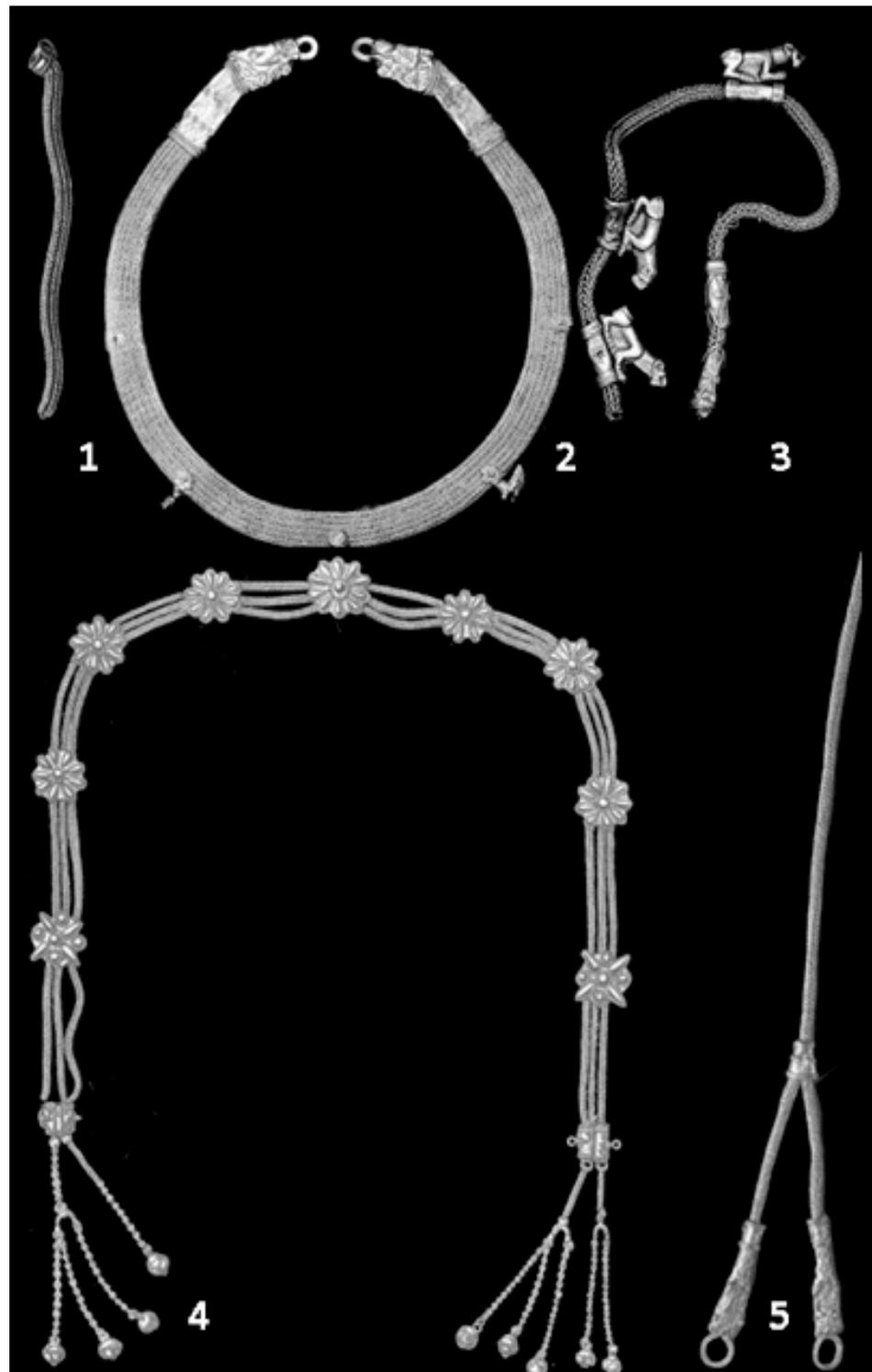


Figure 8. Foxtail chains (1)—Witaszkowo hoard: a segment of the foxtail chain with cylindrical final (after [Furtwängler 1883](#)); (2)—braided Strap with pendants broken off in Antiquity, Bratoliubiv's'kyi Kurhan, Kherson, Ukraine, late sixth–fifth century BCE (after [Reeder 1999](#)); (3)—foxtail chain segment and spacers from the princely tomb(?) at Zöldhalompuszta, Hungary (after [Kemenczei 2009](#)); (4)—three-fold foxtail chain with flower- and tube-shaped spacers, Litoi Kurhan said to be near Kucerivka, Kirovohrad Oblast, Ukraine (after [Onajko 1966](#)); (5)—Segment of a bifurcated foxtail chain, Sindos, Macedonia, Greece, female Grave 67, ca 510 BCE (after [Vokotopoulou 1985](#)).



Figure 9. Images of Persian warriors with tasseled quivers. (1)—relief from Persepolis, early 5th century (after Roaf 1983); (2)—polychrome-modelled brick frieze from Susa ca 510 BCE (Berlin Vorderasiatisches Museum); (3)—cylician stater, Tarsos, late 5th century, God Nergal as a kneeling archer (after Müseler 2021, 9.6.5a); (4)—cylinder seal from the Oxus treasure (Takht-i Kuwad?) early 5th century (after Merrill 2005).

Despite these shortcomings, this provincial artisan successfully applied a coherent Ionian-inspired animal frieze to the golden skin of wholly un-Greek weaponry (Vidale 2007, p. 259). Moreover, his ability to integrate stylistic details and elements from the worlds of the polis and both the Pontic and the Carpathian steppes shows him to have been artistically—and, obviously, linguistically—bilingual.

This iconographic bilingualism begins in the figurative décor with the idea of using an animal's body; in this case, that of a fish/ketos as the backdrop for a figurative narrative. This is a variation of the "zoomorphic juncture" (Hanks 2010, pp. 180–82; Becker 2015), i.e., using the body of one animal as a canvas for images of others, an idea that has roots in the Eurasian steppe, reaching back to the Late Bronze Age (Metzner-Nebelsick 2004). This concept would have been anathema to most Greeks.

While most of Witaszkowo's embossed animals have features that follow Ionian conventions, like the notch in the wild boar's mane (Cook and Dupont 1998, pl. 10,1, pl. 17,1.2), some also reflect Scythian imagery. The fish's fallow deer is a case in point. Its neck is compacted, its antler rack stacks at an almost horizontal angle, and the front tine bends back sharply. These features neither conform to physical realities nor to Eastern Greek stylistic conventions (Walter-Karydi 1973, p. 144, no. 930). They are, however, a mandatory aspect of the stags shown in the animal art of the steppes in the first half of the first millennium BCE, and they clearly had an emblematic character. In the late seventh and sixth century BCE, stags with stout necks and oversized, horizontal antlers linked iconographic landscapes as far-flung as Hungary and Southern Siberia (Jacobson 1983). The iconographic and aesthetic fusion of Ionian and steppe elements reflects the complex hybridization that characterises the figurative iconography of elite symposia and martial assemblages in the north Pontic steppes (Nebelsick 2012).

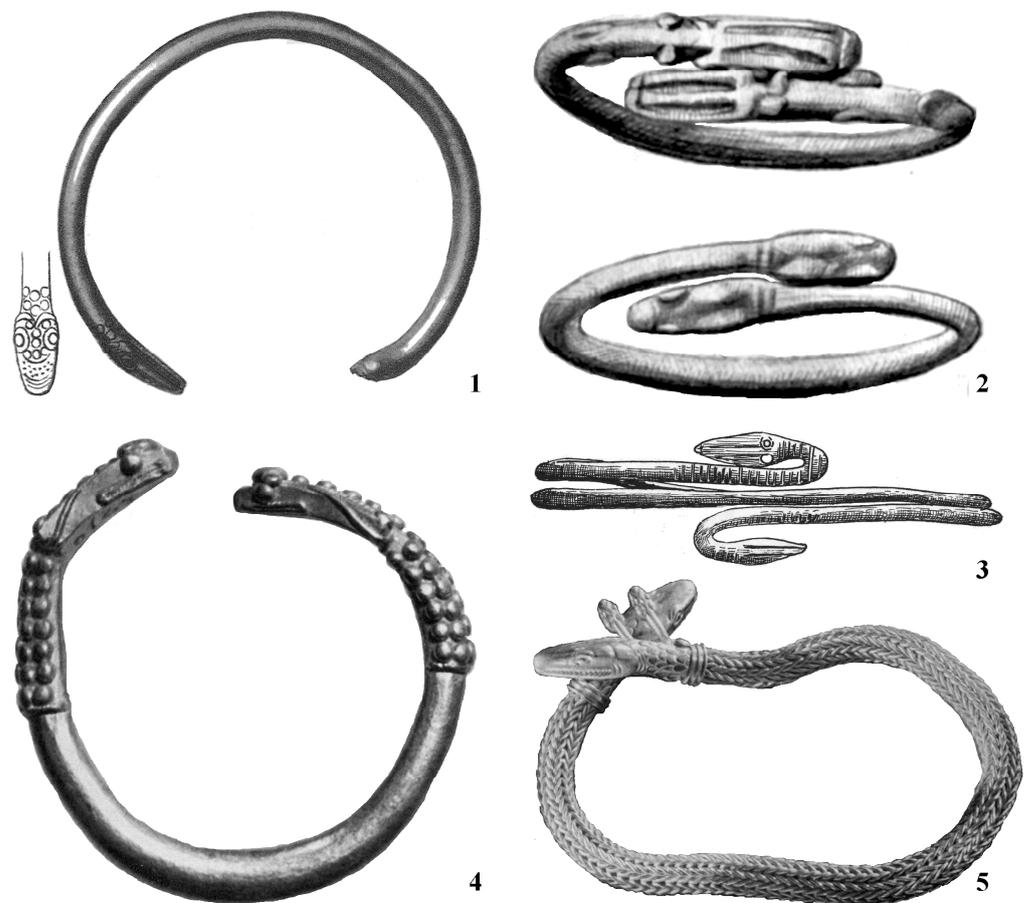


Figure 10. Arm rings with snake head finals: (1)—Witaszkowo hoard snake-headed arm ring (after Furtwängler 1883); (2)—snake arm rings from female graves 31 and 57 from Szentes Vekerzug, com. Csongrad, Hungary, late 6th century (after Párducz 1954); (3)—snake arm ring from Ditzingen-Schöckingen, Kr. Ludwigsburg, Germany, late 6th century (after Zürn 1987); (4)—snake arm ring from Duvanli, obl. Plovdiv, Bulgaria, Kukova Mogila, late 6th—early 5th century BCE (after Filow 1934); (5)—golden foxtail arm ring with snake-head finals from Varennikovskaya Stanitsa, Krasnodar region, Russia, Seven Brothers Kurhan 4, early 5th century BCE (after Artamonov and Formann 1970).

Considering their location on the far Western periphery of the Scythian world, it is interesting to note that there are specifically Western elements in the style and composition of Witaszkowo's golden mounts. The "Vettersfelde" type of akinakes has a clear distribution focus in the Northeastern Carpathian piedmont (Topal 2021a, p. 608, fig. 50). The filigree on its hilt can be related to the decor of the diadem from a sixth-century BCE Scythian princely tomb near Hungarian Ártánd (Párducz 1965). The beaded rim of its heart-shaped hilt plate is a feature foreign to the akinakai of the Eurasian steppes but a feature of the sheaths of Danubian short swords (Vulpe 1990, pl. 3, 12, 16, 79). The diagonally hatched band that borders the fish mount's fins only occurs sporadically in North Pontic animal art (Artamonov and Formann 1970, pl. 58, 61) but is a defining feature of Carpathian and lower Danubian metalwork in the sixth and fifth centuries BCE (Kull 1998, p. 212f.). Another Danubian/Balkan feature of Witaszkowo's figurative composition is the floating hare racing below the great fish mount's torn off-fin, flaunting obligatory baselines (Kull 1998, p. 435, fig. 4).

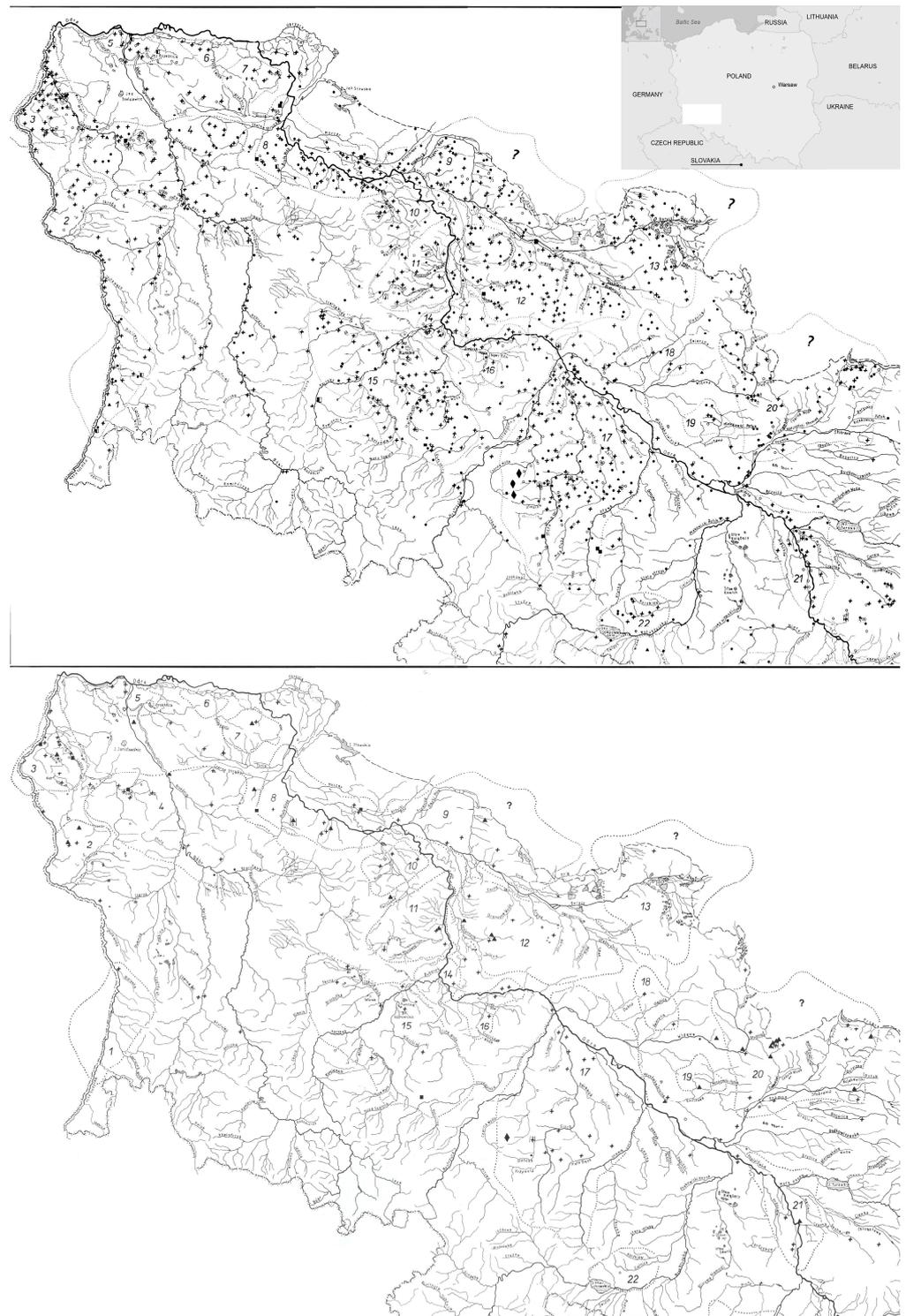


Figure 11. (top and bottom) The collapse of settlement in Lower Silesia in the late Hallstatt period. **(top)** Distribution of Hallstatt C–D1 sites in Lower Silesia and the Stary Kraj. **(bottom)** Distribution of Hallstatt D2–3 sites in Lower Silesia and the Stary Kraj (after [Mierzwiński 1994, 1995](#)).

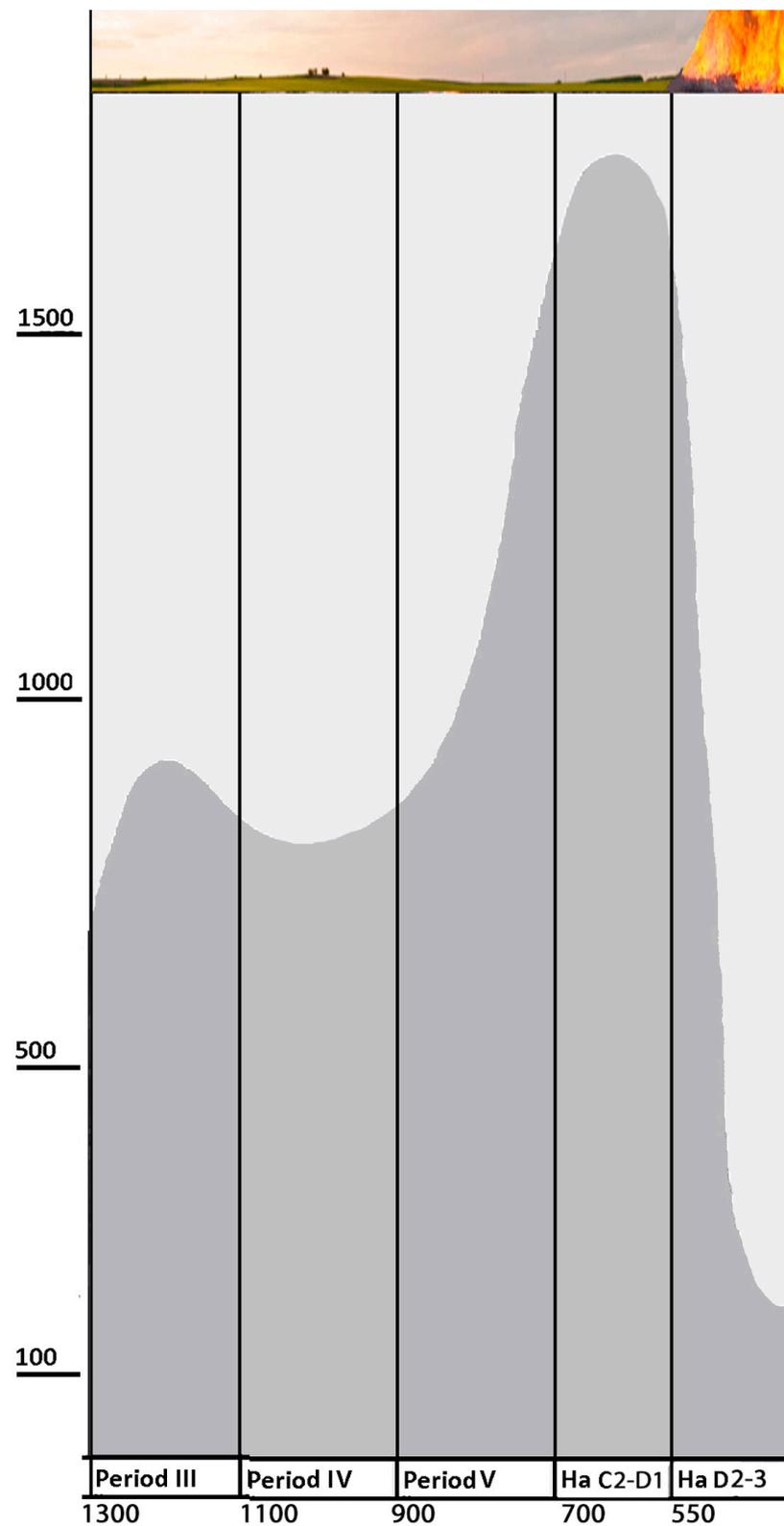


Figure 12. The collapse of settlement in Lower Silesia in the late Hallstatt period (modified after Mierzwinski 1994).

The surviving pieces of the jewellery set also attest to ties with the Western periphery of the nomadic koiné. While metal bracelets with snake-head finials (Figure 10, occur sporadically in women's graves of the Pontic steppe, they are an endemic feature of

women's graves in the Balkans (Stipčević 1981, p. 759 map 1, pl. 15–16) and Greece (Philipp 1981, pp. 222–26), where they probably evoked the Dionysian thiasos (Grabow 1998). They were also found in women's graves of the Scythian Vekerzug/Alföld group in the Carpathian Basin (cf. Figure 8(2): Kemenczei 2009, p. 84f., pl. 71,5, 73,10, 142,11). As an exception, snake-headed arm-rings decorate the arms of an elite male with Scythian connections buried in Stična, Grave 48/33 in the Southeast Alps (Gabrovec et al. 2006, pl. 25,2). The westernmost snake-headed armlets come from a Late Hallstatt Period woman's grave near Ditzingen–Schöckingen in Swabia (Zürn 1987, p. 95, pl. 136). Cylindrical spacers with serrated or indented finials (Figure 1 (20)) decorate the foxtail chain from what was probably a Scythian princely tomb in Hungarian Zöldhalompuszta (Figure 8(3), after Kemenczei 2009, p. 125, no. 70, pl. 32).

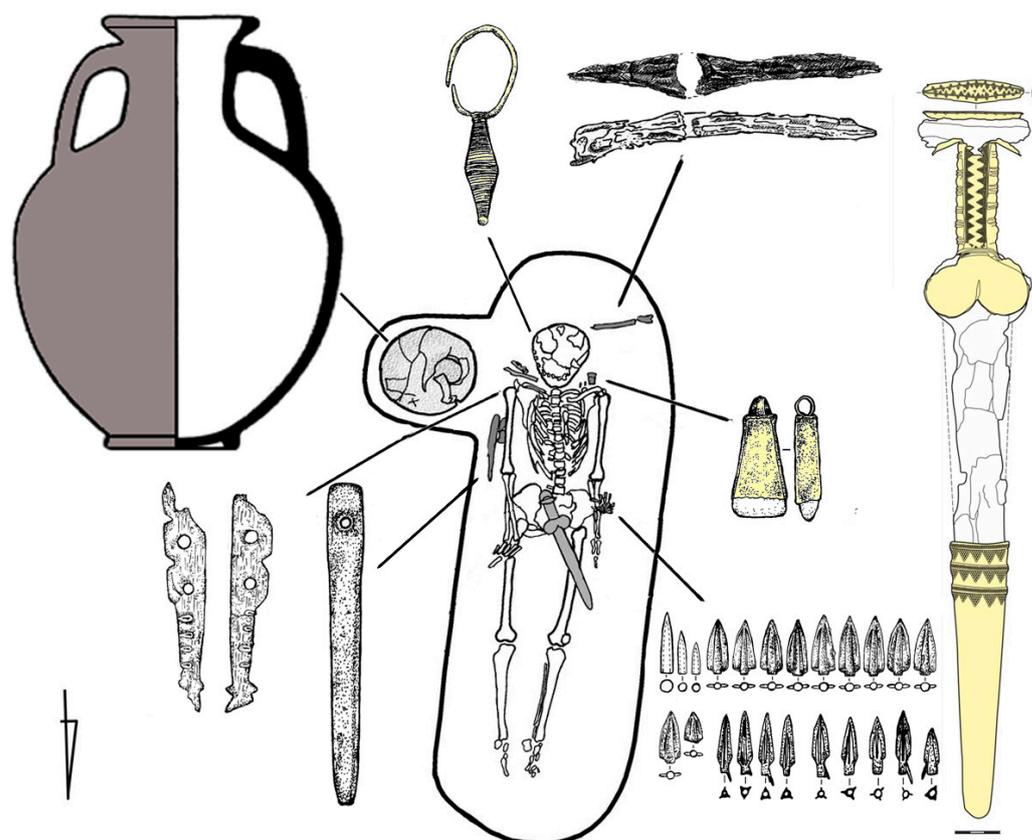


Figure 13. Plan and summary inventory of Mamai-Gora, Kurhan 337, Grave 2, Ukraine, (after Andrukh and Toshev 2022a).

This wealth of Carpathian parallels makes it very likely that the goldsmith who fashioned the Witaszkowo treasure, while imitating the ostentatious regalia of the North Pontic Scythian elite, also provided their style with a “western” flavour. It is also likely that the patron who ordered this finery either came from the western periphery of the Scythian world or intended to gift it to somebody from the west.

Because of the obviously hybrid Scythian/Carpathian/Ionian character of the Witaszkowo regalia's figuration, scholars have long placed their workshop in the ambience of the Archaic Milesian Northwest Pontic apoikiai, which were the foci of complex interactions between Greek and indigenous populations (Boardman 1999, p. 261f.; Bouzek 2008; Tsetschladze 2010). Denis Topal has recently favoured Kyzikos on the Propontus as the workshop site because of the close stylistic relationships between Witaszkowo's imagery and early Kyzikene coinage (Topal 2022, p. 11, fig. 7). However, as mentioned previously, major stylistic idiosyncrasies that characterise Witaszkowo's figuration make its attribution to the workshops of Kyzikos' sophisticated minters and goldsmiths highly unlikely (Avram 2004,

pp. 982–84). Interestingly, however, highly valued electrum Kyzikenes were the leading currency of the Pontus in the late sixth and early fifth centuries. It is, therefore, obvious that they must have been very familiar to the artisan making the Witaszkowo treasure. Indeed, it is more than likely that this ubiquitous electrum coinage will have provided the raw material to manufacture Witaszkowo regalia, and that the artisans may have had them as reference images immediately at hand.

Histria/Istros has been suggested (Alexandrescu 1997) as the location of the Witaszkowo workshop. However, there is as yet no excavated evidence for archaic metalworking in the town, and both the Iron Gate canyon and Carpathian Mountain belt separate Histria quite clearly from Eastern Central Europe. Evidence for metal and jewellery working in the Milesian conglomerate foundation Berezan and Olbia on the Buh/Dnipro (Bug/Dniepr) estuary is much clearer (summarised by Knight 2022, pp. 285–89). The population of both Berezan (Domanskiy and Marchenko 2004; Treister 1998, pp. 179–81; Solovyov and Treister 2004) and Olbia (Kaposchina 1956; Treister 2007, p. 570, fig. 3; Fornasier et al. 2018, p. 45, fig. 35; Ol'hovskij 2016) included metalworkers, and, particularly, jewellers, producing both Greek decorative metalwork and steppe animal-style ornaments in the sixth century BCE. And it was during the sixth century that mirrors, which amalgamate both Greek and Scythian iconographies, were being produced on an industrial scale in Olbia (Kuznetsova 2021), and that Anatolian-inspired wheel-thrown grey ware, which characterised the pottery assemblage of the Milesian coastal foundations, was being imitated by Scythian and Eastern Carpathian potters (Czifra et al. 2020). Moreover, smaller settlements in the thriving Olbian Chora (Kryzhitskiy 2007) have also produced evidence for high-quality metallurgy during the late sixth century BCE (Kryžickij et al. 1989; Solovyov and Treister 2004). Evidence for metalworking artisans also comes from Nikonion, which lies across the Dniester–Liman estuary from ancient Tyras (Sekerskaya 2001). The merchants and artisans of both Tyras and Olbia/Berezan (Tsetskhladze and Treister 1995) would have had easy access to the ore-rich eastern flanks of the Carpathian range and the Volhynian–Pidillian uplands (Gedl 1988, p. 157; Klochko 1994, pp. 139–40; Kvasnytsia 2006). And it is worth mentioning that the metal-rich regions of Transylvania and the Carpatho–Ukraine had been settled and likely exploited by the Ciumbrud and Kushtanovica groups, communities with clear cultural affinities to the steppe cultures of the Ukraine/Moldova by the late seventh century (Rustoiu and Egri 2020, pp. 450–53). The intentional, systematic nature of these early Scythian incursions into the Carpathian piedmont has been underscored by the recent find of a Scythian enclave focused on the environs of the remarkable Chotynek hillfort near Jarosław, Southeast Poland, whose inventory includes an Eastern Greek wine amphora from the late seventh/early sixth century (Czopek 2019, 2020; Trybała-Zawiślak 2020; Grechko 2023).

The vast, 4020 ha stronghold of Bilsk, near Poltava, Ukraine, which has been identified with Herodotus' Greco–Scythian town Gelonus (Godley 1920; Shramko 1987, 2006), has yielded plentiful evidence for sophisticated metalworking, including animal art plaques (Shramko 2016, p. 589, fig. 9–10; Skoryi and Zimovetz 2019), as well as over 10,000 sherds of imported Greek amphoras and fine wares, ranging from the seventh to the sixth and early fifth century BCE (Skoryi and Zimovetz 2019, pl. 48; Gavriljuk 2007, p. 634f.). Besides indigenous pottery, Bilsk's pottery assemblage also included Eastern Carpathian Zobotin/Basarabi wares (Shramko 1987, pp. 73–74, fig. 48–49) and Lusatian-type aviform rattles (Shramko 1987, p. 94, fig. 64, 7–9). Evidence for the bilingualism of the population of these large strongholds, which is alluded to by Herodotus, is shown by sporadic sherds with Greek inscriptions found both in Bilsk and the vast Nemyriv stronghold on the Dniester near Vinnytsia, Ukraine (Polinskaya 2023; Braund 2008, p. 360, fig. 1; Smirnova et al. 2018). Nemyriv is another vast proto-urban stronghold with evidence of intensive contact with both the Ionian colonists of the Black Sea, beginning in the mid-seventh century, and "Hallstatt" populations of the Northeastern Carpathian piedmont (Daragan 2020; Smirnova et al. 2018, esp. fig. 166). A Scythian situla decorated with a Carpathian-style "Basarabi" spiral frieze from Western Ukrainian Podilia is a spectacular example of the

stylistic hybridity mastered by indigenous craftsmen on the western fringe of the Scythian settlement (Węgrzynowicz 2001). Yet it should be kept in mind that even highly specialised artisans could be itinerant, as is shown by 6th to 5th century figured punches found at the sites of ostentatious burials, sanctuaries, and small settlements (Kull and Stîngă 1997; Leskov 1990; Treister 2001, pp. 74–76), indicating that metalworkers could set up shop wherever they were needed. Moreover, indigenous jewellers serving the elites of the Pontic steppe were continuously appropriating and adapting Mediterranean technological and iconographic innovations, reaching a high degree of sophistication (Lifantli 2023).

Thus, it is as likely that the Witaszkowo regalia, which were expressly made for the needs of a Western Scythian client, were fashioned either in a Greek workshop attuned to Scythian imagery on the Pontic coast or a Scythian workshop appropriating Ionian style and iconography in or around the proto-urban sites of the interior.

2.4. Dating the Hoard

Dating the hoard is, of course, vital for understanding its position in the development of Graeco–Scythian art, its historical context in the period of Persian expansion, the cultural context of its deposition in the Far West, and its meaning within the landscape and site where it was finally deposited.

Since Furtwängler’s definitive publication of the hoard, his stylistic dating to the end of the sixth and/or beginning of the fifth century BCE has found general acceptance. Interestingly, however, Furtwängler was guided not only by stylistic criteria but also by the fact that he imagined that Witaszkowo was the grave of a Scythian leader who had retreated from Darius’ onslaught on Thrace and Scythia in 512 BCE. Furtwängler’s dating has been both corroborated and challenged by more recent finds. As argued above, it is likely that the Witaszkowo akinakes and their filigree-decorated chape were manufactured in the early sixth century. However, features of the embossed decoration on the Witaszkowo sheath, as well as the fish and cloverleaf gorytos mounts, suggest that the figurative décor of the Witaszkowo regalia can be securely dated to the second half of the sixth century BCE. These include the aforementioned affinities with the figuration of later sixth-century BCE South Ionian/Milesian Fikellura pottery (Kerschner and Schlotzhauer 2005), which was imported in significant quantities by in the Milesian foundations on the Northern and Western Black Sea coast and may also have been imitated there by indigenous potters (Alexandrescu 1997; Vachtina 2007; Bouzek 2008). A late sixth-century BCE date is also suggested by the close correspondence between the style of the Witaszkowo animals, as well as the fish-wielding Nereus/Triton figure on the frieze of the Athena temple at Assos, built in the third quarter of the sixth century BCE (Finster-Hotz 1984, p. 131, pl. IV–V; Maggidis 2009, p. 86f.). Moreover, Denis Topal (2020, 2022) has recently echoed Furtwängler (Furtwängler 1883, pp. 24–29) in stressing the close stylistic parallels between the Witaszkowo figuration and archaic, late sixth-century BCE Kyzikene coinage. Obviously, the Witaszkowo akinakes had a one-to-two-generation-long illustrious biography before being upgraded with Ionian iconography and gifted shortly thereafter to a recipient in the west.

Finally, the evidence from our excavations on the site of its discovery in Kosów should be considered (Kobyliński 2014). The latest pottery from the site is best seen in the context of later Hallstatt D Białowice/Billendorf ceramic sequences, which clearly predates the Górzycy III wares we found at the neighbouring Starosiedle stronghold. The southern expansion of the Górzycy group from the Oderbruch Basin to Lusatia took place during its third (Ha D3) fifth-century development phase. These immigrants filled the vacuum caused by the late sixth-century BCE Scythian incursion (Lewczuk 2004).

All this makes it likely that not only the manufacturing of the hoard, but also the deposition of the hoard, which was in mint condition, must have occurred between ca 540 and 510 BCE.

3. The Site of the Hoard

It is a remarkable fact that while so much has been published about the content of the Witaszkowo hoard, very little has been written about its exact find spot and position in the landscape. In the immediate aftermath of the discovery, the site was well-known and needed no signposting. However, the destruction of Guben's historic centre, including the museum's archives, and the expulsion of the German population east of the Neisse at the close of the Second World War (Osekowski 1994) led to a complete break in local knowledge about the hoard and post-war attempts to localise its site remained fruitless. Luckily, detailed written descriptions, which have proved invaluable for reconstructing the site's position, were published shortly after its discovery (summarised by Nebelsick 2014). In 2000, I realised that the contemporary descriptions combined with historical maps would lead us to the hoard's findspot, and this proved to be the case in 2001 when the fertile basin southeast of Guben known as the Sary Kraj (Das Alte Land, or the old country) became the focus of the Saxon–Polish Stronghold Project. The results of our excavations have been fully published (Kobyliński 2014) and need only to be summarised here.

In 2002, a trial excavation revealed a series of Iron Age pits with evidence of intensive burning on an upper slope of the site and, more pertinently, intensive activity on its lower, western edge, where it interfaced with water-logged sediments. In 2004, work concentrated on this part of the site, which had formerly been the shore of a shallow pond and showed signs of intensive Iron Age activity, including pottery depositions, a large stone pavement, and wood- and stone-lined pits in water-logged sediment. One of these was Feature 169, a multiphase wood-and-stone-lined spring whose contents included 223 fragmented and whole omphalos bowls, a pendant fashioned from a sixth-century BCE East-Alpine fibula, and seven North Pontic glass beads (Figure 14; Kobyliński 2014, pp. 119–27, 391–410, pl. 9,2). Moreover, the pottery assemblage from the site could be dated to the early/late Iron Age transition, roughly the late sixth century BCE (Ha D2). It is highly likely that the Witaszkowo hoard was deposited in or near this feature.

The fruitful Sary Kraj basin, in which the site of Witaszkowo is embedded, was densely settled in the Late Bronze Age to early Iron Age (Figure 15; Mierzwiński 1995). It is the core landscape in the Oder–Neisse triangle, through which travelers and traders moving from Silesia and Bohemia to the north had to pass. Moreover, the Sary Kraj and neighbouring Lower Lusatia are the most southwestern territories in which hoarding, particularly in wet contexts, was practised north of the Central European mountain belt in the Early Iron Age. (Buck 1979, p. 35, pp. 75f., fig. 63; Blajer 2001, pp. 65–70, 293–97). Lying on the edge of a settlement in a waterlogged context, the location of our gold find is typical for this hoarding tradition.

Interestingly, Witaszkowo is not the only site in the region to have produced finds with North Pontic affinities. In the ninth century BCE, three pre-Scythian daggers were deposited on the flanks of the Landeskrone hillfort near Görlitz, 100 km south of Witaszkowo (Puttkammer 2007, p. 113, no. 63). Moreover, an early Scythian antler ram-head rein-knob (Bandrivs'kij 1998) is said to have been found in a late seventh/early sixth-century BCE chambered tomb in 1941 during hasty rescue excavations in Brożek/Scheuno, 30 km to the southwest (Bukowski 1977, p. 36f., No. 4).

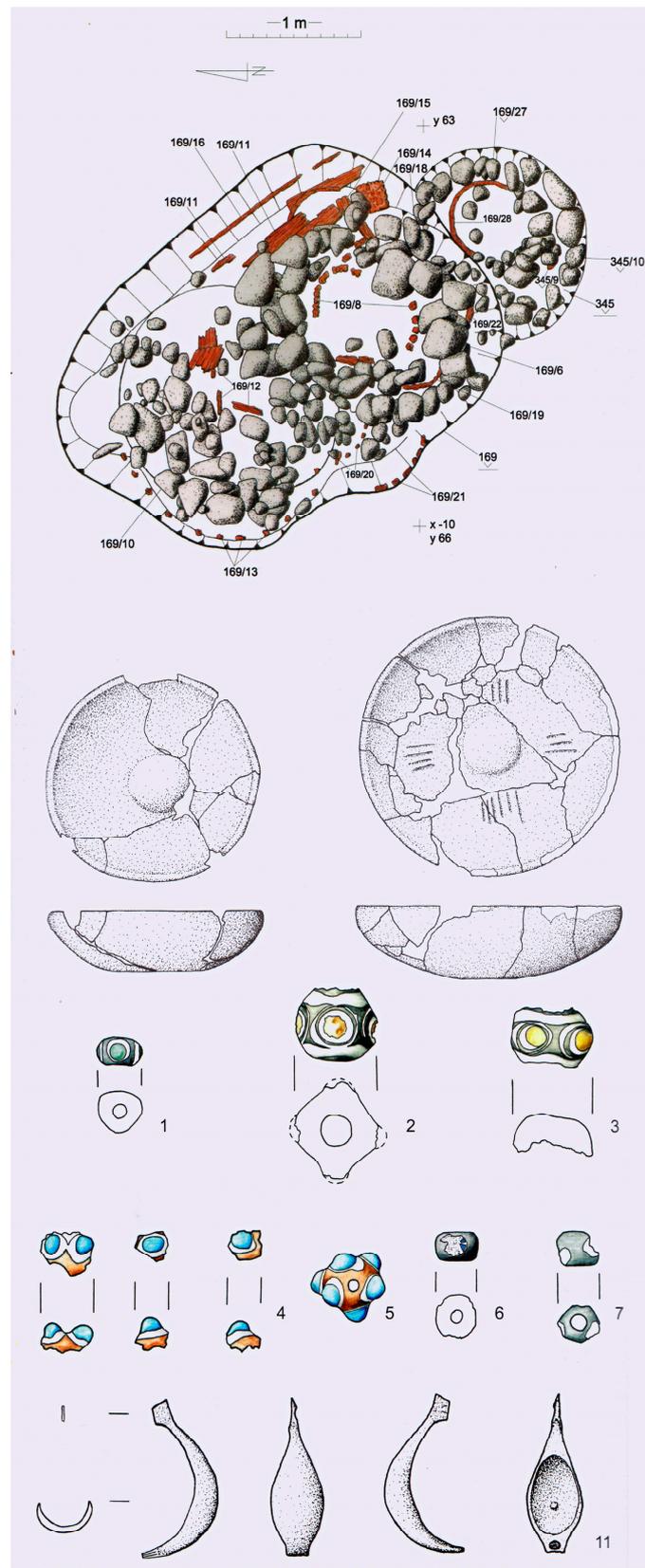


Figure 14. Kozów, woj. lubuskie (Poland), Feature 169, plan, and a selection of the finds (modified after [Kobyliński 2014](#)). 1–7: Pontic glass beads, 11: Pendant made from a much-eroded East Alpine fibula.

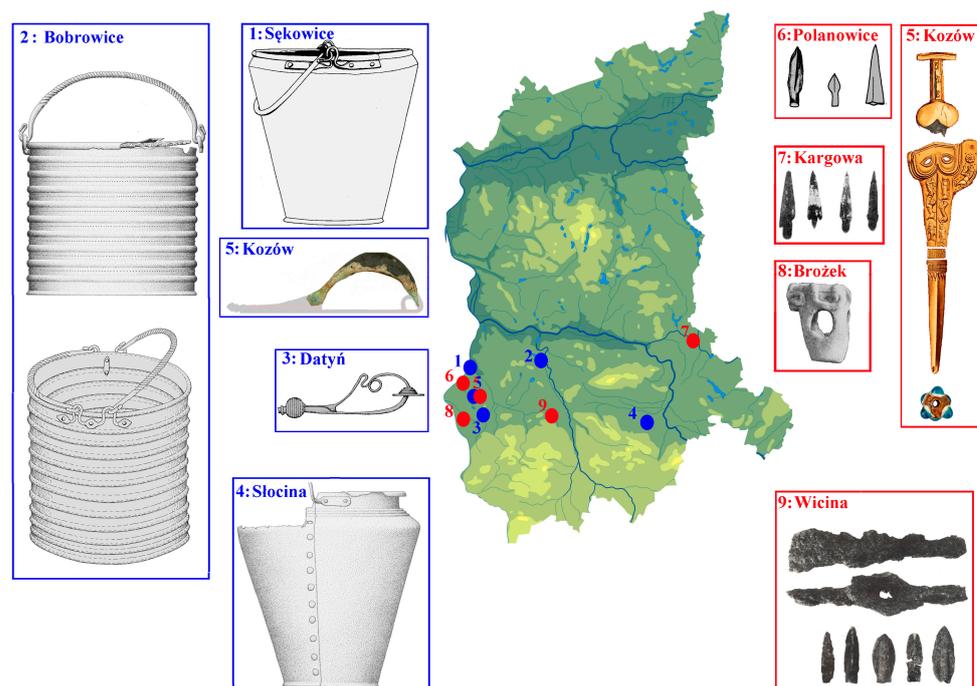


Figure 15. The Stary Kraj, environs of Gubin, Southwest Poland. blue southern imports: red Scythian finds. (after Nebelsick 2014).

In the sixth century BCE, traces of the presence of steppe archers in this peripheral region intensified. Trilobate arrowheads have been recovered from the Niemcza Łużycka stronghold near Polanowice, just 6 km to the west of Witaszkowo (Bukowski 1977, p. 102f., no. 57; Domański and Lewczuk 1998), which was destroyed and abandoned before the beginning of the fifth century BCE. More impressive evidence for a besieged stronghold was found at Wicina's Góra Zamkowa (Schloßberg), a defended island in a swampy basin some 20 km southwest of Witaszkowo (Figure 16). Its box rampart, which was first erected in 754 BCE, underwent repeated repairs, the last in 571 BCE before it was finally destroyed by fire in the late sixth century BCE and never re-erected (Krapiec and Szychowska-Krapiec 2013). Battle axes, horse gear, and over 140 Scythian arrowheads, as well as hastily buried bodies of women and children, are related to the site's destruction (Figure 16, Bukowski 1977, pp. 127–34; Kossack 1987; Jaszewska and Kałagate 2011). Anja Hellmuth (Hellmuth 2006b, 2010) has shown that the quiver assemblages of the attackers, while having a clear Carpathian component, also included arrows from the north Pontic steppes. Interestingly, an iron blade of what is likely to be a Scythian akinakes was recovered from a cremation grave in the stronghold's cemetery (Bukowski 1977, p. 134), indicating that there may have been times of more peaceful interaction between the stronghold's elite and steppe horsemen before the final onslaught (Bukowski 1977, p. 136, no. 76c, p. 190, fig. 8). The north-westernmost evidence of raiding by mounted warriors consists of arrowheads from the interior of the Late Bronze and Early Iron Age stronghold of Zützen, 90 km west of Witaszkowo (Figure 17, Koepke 1996; Biermann and Georgi 2018), which was also burnt and abandoned in the late sixth century.

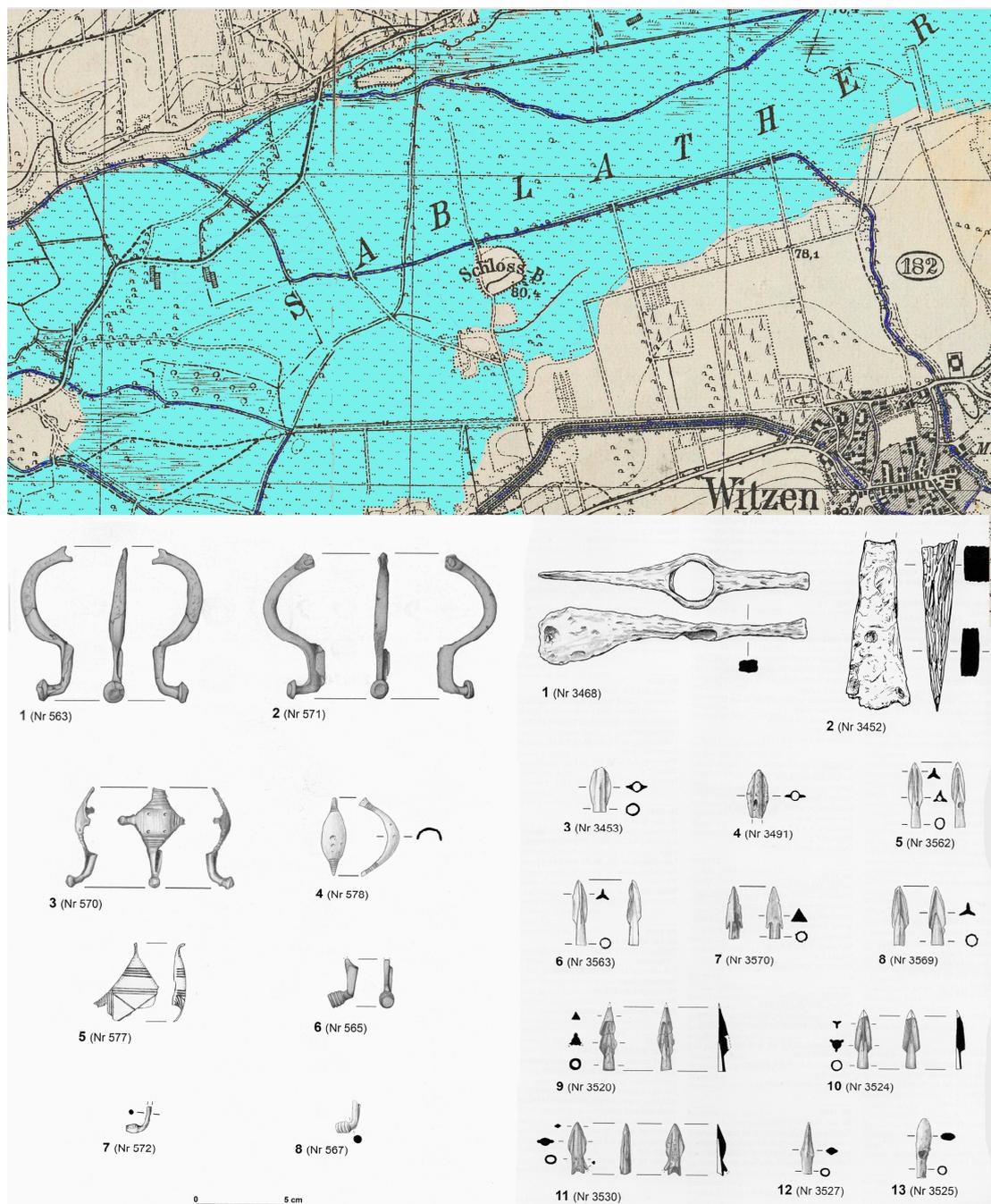


Figure 16. Top: Location of the Wicina, “Góra Zamkowa”/Witzen, “Schloßberg” stronghold in the Zabłocie bog, woj. lubuskie Poland. The cemetery on the bog island just southeast of the Stronghold (modified after Ordinance Survey map/Messtischblatt Gassen 4256 (2405) 1911: http://igrek.amzp.pl/TK25_4256, accessed on 7 January 2024). Bottom: Selection of finds from the Wicina “Góra Zamkowa” stronghold, woj. lubuskie Poland (after Jaszewska and Kałagate 2011).

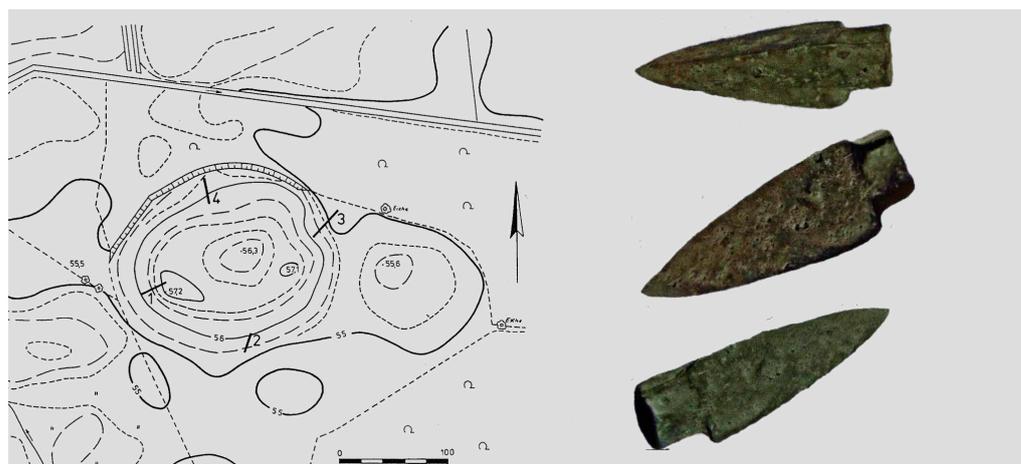


Figure 17. Zützen, Lkr. Dahme-Spreewald, Brandenburg. Plan of the swamp stronghold and Scythian arrowheads found in its interior by metal detectorists (after [Koepeke 1996](#); [Biermann and Georgi 2018](#)).

4. Slaving, Raiding, Diplomatic Gifts the Hoard'S Historical Context

Obviously, the Scythian presence in Lusatia and, above all, the deposition there of the most spectacular Graeco–Scythian golden regalia of the Archaic period, need an explanation within the context of the complex history of contact and conflict between stratified central European farming communities and steppe horsemen.

As one might expect with a complex and historically crucial topic such as this, there has been a protracted and hotly argued debate regarding both the nature of this interaction and its chronological framework, which cannot be repeated here (see [Parzinger 1993](#)). Instead, the narratives proposed by Jan [Chochorowski \(2014\)](#) and Denys [Grechko \(2020a, 2021\)](#) will be loosely followed.

Early Iron Age contact between inhabitants of the north Pontic steppes and their western neighbours comprised two radically different phases. The initial phase, which lasted from the mid-seventh to mid-sixth century BCE, was characterised by complex patterns of infiltration and cultural formation that saw communities living on the western fringes of the Eastern European steppe and adjacent upland regions adopting and adapting “Scythian” lifestyles, warfare, aesthetics, and foodways while retaining some, mainly female, indigenous costume accessories ([Kozubová 2019a, 2019b](#)). This suggests that complex patterns of exogamy accompanied the consolidation of “Scythian” lifeways in the Carpathian steppes as they did with the emergence of the “Thraco–Cimmerian” in the Late Bronze Age ([Metzner-Nebelsick 2022](#)).

Interestingly, preliminarily published genetic analyses show no discernable Eastern steppe component in the aDNA of Carpathian “Scythians” ([Järve et al. 2019](#), p. 2432, fig. 3), in contrast to the inhabitants of the Ukrainian steppes. Their role as genetic “outliers” of Scythian skeletons sampled from the Pontic and eastern steppes underscores a high degree of indigenous appropriation that accompanied their cultural expansion to the west. This formation of Scythianizing communities in the Eastern Carpathian Basin in the second half of the seventh century BCE corresponds to the phase Ha D1 in the west, a period during which Eastern Central European societies on the Eastern Alpine Piedmont, Moravia, Silesia, Lusatia, and Great Poland flourished ([Baron 2017a](#)), reaching unprecedented levels of hierarchisation and centralization (Figure 18) One crucial factor in understanding the historical ramifications of this initial consolidation of Scythian and allied cultural groups with steppe lifeways in the Eastern Carpathian Basin and the Northern Carpathian Piedmont is that it occurs concurrently with the establishment of Milesian foundations on the northwestern Pontic coast, in particular, Berezan/Boresthenes, where there is evidence for a large-scale working of Carpathian copper ([Domanskij and Marcenko 2003](#), p. 35). At the same time, the flow of Carpathian copper to the north and west appears to have been disrupted ([Nowak and Gan 2023](#)). It is compelling to link Scythian

expansion into the metal-rich regions with the establishment of emporia by Milesians on the Northwestern Black Sea coast and to see Miletus’ wide-ranging Pontic ventures enmeshed in the Lydian territorial expansion in Western Anatolia (Knight 2019; Portalsky 2021).

		SW-Poland Lusatia	NW Carpathian Basin/Moravia	Eastern Carpathian Basin, W. Ukr Ukraine	Pontic Steppes	Historic Events
500	D3					
	D2				Middle Scythian Period	513 Persian conquest of Thrace expedition against Scythia
		Kargowa Witaszkowo				
	Heune- burg IVa	Wicina Zützen Polanowice Strzegom	Dédestapol- csány Provodov- Horákov Smolenice			ca 547 Fall of Sardis Miletus vassal of Persia
550					Shumeyko Mamai Gora	since ca 550 Kyzikene elertron coins Pontic standard
				Zöldhalom- puszta		
				Ártánd		
600	Ha D1				Early Scythian (Kelermes Period)	ca 600 Milesian-Lyidian alliance
						ca 620 foundation of Olbia
				Formation of the Alföld/ Vekerzug group in the Carpathian steppes and the Steppian cultures in the Carpathian foothills		ca 630 foundation of Istros
				Start of “Scythian settle- ment in Transylvania - Ciumbrud groupoup.		ca 650 foundation of Berezan/Boresthene
650						

Raiding - Stealing

Foundation of Carpathian Skythia

Figure 18. Chronological table. Red indicates evidence for violent raiding.

In the last 30 years, many scholars have broken with the idea of a single Scythian incursion into the west linked to Persia’s European campaign as proposed by Furtwängler and his epigones, instead favouring a two-phase process spanning the late seventh to the beginning of the fifth century BCE (for instance, Parzinger 1993; Teržan 1998; Hellmuth Kramberger 2017a; Chochorowski 2014). However, recent reassessments of the relevant evidence (Grechko 2020b, 2021) suggest that western raiding was, in fact, a short-lived phenomenon lasting little more than a generation. With the advent of the Middle Scythian period in the mid-sixth century BCE (Grechko 2012; Topal 2019, p. 144), dynamic, in many cases, martial incursions were now made by Eastern European mounted archers into the thickly settled agricultural landscapes of Transdanubia, Lower Austria, Moravia, Bohemia, Silesia, and Lusatia, whose population’s material culture and pronounced funerary ostentation were allied to the Western Central European Hallstatt Culture. This dynamic steppe warrior impact in the west corresponds, on the one hand, to the establishment of a new aristocracy in the western Pontic steppes employing Eastern Scythian iconographies and, on the other, to concurrent destruction horizons in proto-urban strongholds, suggesting all-encompassing turmoil and instability (Grechko 2016). When seen within the context of Persian expansion by the last decade of the sixth century BCE, it seems likely that Macedonia, Thrace, and the western Pontic littoral, together with the Eastern Carpathian basin, formed an interlinked allied territory with a belligerent boundary menacing the west. Moreover, up to the Ionian revolt, Milesians, Persians, and Scythians were acting “hand in

glove” to secure the rich metal, and, as will be argued below, human resources of Eastern Central Europe (Georges 2000, pp. 11–15).

Besides the most Western strongholds with evidence of Scythian destructions mentioned above (i.e., Wicina, Polanowice, Zützen), lowland swamp forts in Western Poland with Scythian arrow findings include Kargowa in greater Poland (Bukowski 1977, p. 64f.), as well as Kameniec (Gackowski et al. 2018) and Kruszwica in Kujavia (Chochorowski 2014, p. 32). Upland hillforts include the “breite Berg” near Strzegom, whose burnt rampart was riddled with trilobate arrowheads (Bukowski 1977, pp. 112–15), and the vast defended Słęża mountain top (Bukowski 1977, pp. 116–68), both in Central Silesia. Moreover, Scythian arrowheads have also been recovered from remote upper Silesian pinnacles and rock shelter refuges, illustrating the all-encompassing ferocity of the conflict (Chochorowski 2014, fig. 19,8).

In the Carpathian Basin, the best-studied example of a fortification destroyed by Scythian raiding is a stronghold on a spur of the lesser Carpathian Mountains called Smolenice–Molpír in Western Slovakia (Stegmann-Rajtár 2005; Hellmuth 2006a, 2006b; Müller 2012). It was once thought to have been destroyed before the turn of the sixth century BCE (Parzinger and Stegmann-Rajtár 1988) and to have been the first Eastern Hallstatt stronghold to fall to a Scythian raid. However, new dendrochronological dates make it clear that the destruction took place after 585 BCE. Moreover, the pottery assemblages found under the collapsed rampart (Dušek and Dušek 1984) include late Hallstatt shapes (Dular 1982), making it likely that the site was destroyed in the second half of the sixth century BCE (Grechko 2020a; Barta et al. 2017). Evidence for this impressive 12 hectare large hillfort’s destruction includes ca 400 trilobate arrows shot into easily accessible parts of the ramparts and gates and remains of human skeletons in burnt dwellings in its interior. Remarkably, this arrow assemblage includes points native to both the Carpathian and Pontic steppes as well as an Anatolian/Persian example (Hellmuth 2006b; Hellmuth Kramberger 2018; Herzhoff 2022). Finds of scales chopped off lamellar armor worn by the Scythian elite (Čambal 2007) are a testimony to both the ferocity of the battle and the participation of pinnacle warriors in the heterogenous group of steppian archers sacking this protourban community.

Three hundred kilometers to the east of Smolenice Gabor Szabó’s surveys and excavations of the impressive 123-hectare large promontory fort Dédestapolcsány–Verebce-bérc which lies on the flanks of the Bükk Mountains in northern Hungary revealed a hail of 249 trilobate arrows aimed at a bastion of its outer rampart. Hundreds of others were recovered from burnt buildings, some containing human skeletons, in the site’s interior (Szabó and Bakos 2014, pp. 337–40; Szabó et al. 2014; Hellmuth Kramberger 2021; Szabó et al. 2023).

To the northwest of Smolenice, the Moravian strongholds of Provodov–Ludkovice/Rysov (Novák 2017) Křenovice Hradisko and Horákovský hrad are also likely to have been destroyed by steppian archers in the late sixth century BCE (Bartík et al. 2017, pp. 45–48, 50; Topal and Golec 2017). Czech Scholars see these violent events as an aspect of the forcible incorporation of Moravian and possibly neighboring Bohemian lowlands “into a larger political formation of the Vekezug culture” during the second half of the 6th century (Golec et al. 2016; Bartík et al. 2017). All these events fit the timeframe of the destruction of the aforementioned Lusatian strongholds perfectly.

The cultural context and effect of these destructive incursions varied from landscape to landscape. In Western Slovakia, the second half of the sixth century BCE saw a drastic reduction in the number of settlement sites and the end of funerary ostentation, followed by a shift in cultural orientation towards the Eastern Carpathian Basin (Romsauer 1996; Stegmann-Rajtár 2017). At the same time, as in Silesia, remote mountaintop sites in the region were being used as refuges (Barta et al. 2023). In Transdanubia and Northeastern Austria, the impact of Scythian raiding was more drastic (Jerem 1981; Teržan 1998, pp. 518–26; Soós 2020). Skythian arrowheads have been recovered from large defended proto-urban centers like Celldömölk–Sághegy and Velem—Szentvid but also smaller rural

settlements such as Ménfőcsanak, Széles-földek, all of which were destroyed and abandoned in the late 6th century (Szabó and Bakos 2014, pp. 341–43). A drastic reduction in the population between the bend of the Danube and the East Alpine piedmont was followed by a regionally differentiated patchy resettlement in the late sixth/fifth century BCE (Patek 1993; Soós 2021; Soós et al. 2023). In the Kalenderberg region in Northeastern Austria, the population collapse seems to have been particularly drastic and recovery extremely meager, with the eponymous ritual Kalenderberg pottery that once characterized the region disappearing entirely (Nebelsick 1996, 1997; Tarpini 2019; Teržan 1998). This created the preconditions for the immigration of Western European Celts into the area in the early-to-mid-fifth century BCE (Jerem 1996; Nebelsick 1997; Ramsel 2018). It is worth mentioning the importance of high-status women in the funerary ostentation of the Kalenderberg region and the general lack of weapon graves in the region (Teržan 1986). Like the “Lusatian” communities in Southwestern Poland this society was clearly not participating in the prevailing custom of martial ostentation, which is typical for many Hallstatt Period elites (Frey 1983), and this lack of a warrior ethos may have made the both groups particularly vulnerable to lethal raiding.

In Moravia (Bartík et al. 2017; Topal and Golec 2017; Kozubová and Golec 2020) and Bohemia (Chytráček et al. 2010; Trefný 2017), there is strong evidence for mid-to-late sixth-century BCE raiding. While the reduction in the local population, abandonment of strongholds, and a blurring of cultural identities are palpable in the material record, there is substantially more evidence for continuity in the Late Hallstatt period than in the aforementioned Kalenderberg region. Recently, Denys Grechko (2021) has revived Tadeusz Sulimirski’s (1961) vision of a Scythian raid to the far west, leading, among other things, to the destruction of the Heuneburg in the late sixth century BCE. However, only three trilobate arrowheads have survived from this well-excavated site despite the fact that Scythian arrowheads are widely distributed in the west (Mercer 1970; Bofinger 2006; Hauser 2019). Their presence, along with Eastern European axes at other Western sites, such as the Hallstatt salt-miner’s cemetery, suggests their presence had a more sophisticated background than martial interaction.

As noted above, the impact of Scythian raiding was particularly dramatic in Lower Silesia, parts of Great Poland, and Eastern Lusatia (Chochorowski 2014; Baron and Miązga 2013; Baron 2017b), where all investigated Early Iron Age strongholds were either abandoned or burned (Niesiołowska-Wędzka 1974; Buck 1979), often with evidence of steppe warrior agency. Thanks to the existence of published systematic surveys of closely dated Early Iron Age sites, it is possible to document the all-but-complete collapse of the Lusatian population in the Middle Oder Basin before the turn of the fifth century (Figures 11 and 12; Mierzwiński 1994; Mierzwiński 1995), and their subsequent replacement with immigrant populations with Northern European affinities (Dzięgielewski 2016; Grechko 2023, pp. 426–27, fig. 9).

It is instructive to compare this situation with that of the Upper Vistula Basin, which was inhabited by communities with strong cultural ties to the north Pontic steppes and experienced no disruption in the sixth century BCE (Przybyła 2009; Gawlik 2010; Czopek 2019; Trybała-Zawiślak 2019). This applies even more clearly to the Vekerzug/Alföld group of the Great Hungarian Plain (Kozubová 2019b). A somewhat different situation can be observed in the upland areas of Moravia as well as Carinthia on the southwestern margin of the Carpathian Basin, where despite some evidence for fired stronghold defenses and the presence of Pontic projectile points, there was no lasting negative impact on local populations or hierarchies (Gleirscher 2009). In the Carinolian highlands of Slovenia, the Scythian incursions were met with a more dynamic response. Elite warriors who were buried in their traditional lineage cemeteries were systematically integrating Scythian horse gear, arrows (and thus, obviously, reflex bows), and steppe battle axes into their weaponry in the late sixth/fifth centuries (Teržan 1998, pp. 526–30; Preložnik 2007). Anja Hellmuth has demonstrated that arrows in the quiver of an elite warrior buried near the Libna stronghold, a gateway community on the interface between the rugged hill country

and the Pannonian plain, included types native to the Eastern steppes, which she believes arrived there as diplomatic gifts (Hellmuth 2007a).

Summing up, we can see that communities in different regions in Eastern Central Europe were affected by the late sixth-century BCE Scythian incursions in remarkably diverse ways. On the one hand, areas like Lower Silesia, Eastern Lusatia, Great Poland, Northeastern Austria, and Transdanubia were devastated by Scythian raiding, with only a fraction of their population and almost none of their regional identity and traditional hierarchies left intact. In stark contrast, areas such as the Upper Vistula basin, the Great Hungarian plane, and the Transylvanian basin, which had shown intensive interchange with the material and martial culture of the Eastern European warriors, thrived, as did rugged regions with martial elites such as the Slovenian/Carinthian highlands.

An obvious explanation for this remarkable and almost wholesale collapse of populations in areas impacted by Scythian raiding in the late sixth century BCE, and their replacement by immigrating groups in the fifth, is that raiders physically removed, i.e., captured, and enslaved, most of the inhabitants. The existence of slavery and the impact of slaving in European prehistory has been understudied, probably due, on the one hand, to its repellent nature and, on the other, the instinct of archaeologists to champion their academic charges. It is likely that enslaved individuals were present in ancient European societies from the Neolithic onwards (Gronenborn 2001), and while several studies have stressed the ubiquity of indigenous slaves in late prehistoric Europe, they have found little evidence for systematic commercial slaving or chattel slavery before the late Latène Period (Arnold 1988; Mata 2019; Schönfelder 2015).

Most scholars agree that slaves in “Homeric” society were a byproduct of successful warring, and captives were integrated in small numbers into the oikos of leading families (Finley 1962; see however Harris 2012). In the sixth century BCE, a significant shift occurs in both the intensity of slaving and the number of enslaved individuals. Timothy Taylor (2001, 2005) has pointed out the staggering numbers of enslaved barbarians reported by Greek authors, which he considers credible. Even authors who believe that ancient Greek slavery had been sporadic and had involved smaller numbers of enslaved individuals, see the capture and commodification of non-Greek captives as a significant factor driving colonial settlement (Braund 2011). In antiquity, the northwestern Black Sea was considered a slave coast by Mediterranean authors (Gavriljuk 2003; Parmenter 2020, p. 61; Harrison 2019) and the transshipment centre for Scythian captives. Since Moses Finley’s seminal survey (Finley 1962), there has been a significant increase in evidence attesting to the ubiquity of slaves in the Milesian colonial complex Berezan/Boresthenes and Olbia. This involves, in particular, the remarkable quantity of ostraca, but also early lead letters and graffiti mentioning slaves that date back to the sixth century BCE (Avram 2007; Fischer 2016; Odrin 2019). Moreover, it is possible that the sizable amount of handmade indigenous Scythian pottery, as well as Thracian and Anatolian pottery found in early contexts in Berezan (Dupont 2018; Solovyov 2020a, 2020b), may be the footprint of enslaved women, analogous to the presence of African-style pottery excavated in antebellum North American plantations (Ferguson 1992; Fennell 2011). Like this African American pottery, the handmade “indigenous” pottery from Berezan is likely to have been produced and used by enslaved women in order to maintain their foodways and preserve their domestic dignity. In particular, the incorporation of captive women into the households may have reflected a traditional pattern of the Milesian elites’ dynastic representation, as they styled themselves as the descendants of Ionian conquerors and Carian captives (Crielaard 2009, p. 57). Moreover, Miletus’ Pontic apoikiai are thought to have played a crucial role in marketing Eastern European captives to Ionia (Heinen 2001), and both Miletos and Milesian Kyzikos marketed slaves in the sixth century BCE (Parmenter 2020, p. 63, tab. 1), while Chios was the fulcrum of the international slave trade of the day (Braund and Tsetschladze 1989; Schumacher 2001; Gavriljuk 2003, p. 80).

Interestingly, part of the sweeping changes that accompanied the systematic urban upgrade of Berzan/Boresthenes in the second half of the sixth century included a significant

increase in imported Chian transport amphorae (Chistov 2020), probably reflecting the exchange of Chian wine for Pontic slaves recorded by Theopompos (Braund 2011, p. 115).

Before the rise of the Archaic Greek poleis, the distinction between the sporadic enslavement of prisoners of war as a side effect of victory and systematic profit-driven slaving is likely to have been porous. However, a key shift towards the systematic commercialisation of humans as chattel, which formed the core of mass slavery, was monetisation. Although Lydian and Ionian electrum coins had been minted since the mid-seventh century BCE, and low-value arrow and dolphin money was circulating in the western Pontic hinterland in the early sixth century (Stolyarik 2018), the full monetisation of Black Sea markets first begins in the mid-6th century. This involves Kyzikene electrum coinage becoming established as the standard high denomination coinage in the Pontus (Mildenberg 1995) in the second half of the sixth century BCE. It was this monetary upgrade that made large-scale trade in commodified humans possible. The ubiquity of this coinage among the elites of the Pontic steppe can be seen in the enormous influence that Kyzikene coin imagery had on Greco–Scythian art (Topal 2022; Zymovets 2023).

5. Understanding the Effect of Scythian Raiding in the Comparative Context of the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade

Thomas Harrison (2019) drew heavily on close parallels between ancient and early modern slaving practices to explain ancient descriptions of enslaved peoples. It is equally striking how closely the impact of Scythian incursions into Central Europe in the late sixth century BCE corresponded to the effect that the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade had on 16th-to-18th-century West Africa, adding both credence and coherence to the slaving model proposed in this article. Even a cursory study of the sources reveals remarkably similar patterns of interaction that were triggered by emergent commercial slavery. While the following selected examples are obviously not in any way comprehensive, they are more than random “ethnographic parallels”. Despite the gulf of time and space involved, the mechanisms governing commercial human trafficking and concomitant population extraction led, at least in selected cases, to such similar behavioural patterns that the better-documented early modern examples can serve to illustrate and flesh out the thin and often ambiguous evidence surviving from antiquity.

5.1. Gifting and Monetisation

In West Africa, indigenous elites and European merchants participated in highly sophisticated interactions and dialogues to facilitate the mass extraction of enslaved captives (Bennett 2018), a process in which gift-giving was inevitably embedded. A remarkably apt example that echoes the itinerary and nature of the Witaszkowo regalia has recently been used to illustrate the importance of ostentatious gifting in the context of forging slaving alliances (Araujo 2023). It was an 18th-century silver sword gifted by French traders to an African merchant in a coastal slaving port to cement trading relationships. He in turn, took it far inland and gifted it to the Royal House of Dahomey which was heavily involved in the slave trade (Obichere 1978; Law 1986). But obviously, large-scale systematic slave trading needed a monetary basis. In West Africa, when the value and quantity of slaves overextended traditional exchange currencies like cowry shells, at the turn of the 16th century, European traders introduced the remarkable manillas, massive cast copper alloy armlets with splayed finals, in the slaving port of Calabar (Herbert 1984). They were accepted as money in parts of West Africa up to the early 19th century. Their manufacture and distribution involves an anabasis of brass from the Rhineland over Antwerp as manillas to the Gold Coast and, finally, as payment for slaves to the court of Benin. Indeed, in a close parallel to the posited use of molten Kyzikene coinage to produce electrum for Scythian treasure, in particular, the Witaszkowo regalia, the manillas in Benin were subsequently recycled and used as the raw material for the Benin Bronzes (Skowronek et al. 2023).

5.2. Creolisation

Most archaic Greek emporia were multiethnic communities (Demetriou 2012), and this holds true for Milesian foundations in the Northern Black Sea coast in general (Morel 2010) and Berezan/Olbia in particular. West African ports involved in purchasing captives and transferring them to European slave ships also had sizable multi-ethnic and multilingual communities. While the forts in these factories were nominally under European control, ethnically diverse African and Creole inhabitants dominated and, in many cases, ruled the settlements in which they were embedded. Moreover, people who transcended regional and lineage-based allegiances were pivotal as merchants and negotiators in the interior (Heywood and Thornton 2007, pp. 109–68; Seibert 2012; Law 2013). This significant inland impact of heterogeneous elites in West Africa echoes the sizable Greek component in the heterogeneous pottery assemblages of proto-urban inland strongholds Bilsk and Nemyriw (see above), the mix of Greek, Anatolian and indigenous pottery in Berezan and Olbia, the diverse regional backgrounds of the arrows used by archers involved in sixth-century BCE western raiding (Hellmuth Kramberger 2017a, 2018), and finally the welding of Ionic iconography to Scythian armament in the treasure of Witaszkowo.

5.3. Slaving Zones

A crucial aspect of the Atlantic Slave Trade that plays a pervasive role in the argument of this paper is that commercial slaving in West Africa was not conducted on a random basis. While subjects of slaving states were occasionally enslaved for judicial or financial reasons, as were war captives from competing states, actual slave raiding took place in “slaving zones”. Indigenous slavers considered these areas peripheral and their populations culturally other, thus open for “legitimate” raiding and depopulation (Lewis 2018, p. 274f.; Flynn-Paul and Pargas 2018; esp. Thornton 2018). In Western Africa and elsewhere, not only did the enslaved captives suffer social death, but they also became kinless, defenceless, and homeless (Patterson 1982). The effect of slaving on the traditional patterns of authority and legitimacy within the targeted communities was equally corrosive. Societies in these slaving zones not only had to cope with the irrevocable physical removal of significant proportions of their population (Manning 1990) but also the inevitable concomitant breakdown in traditional authority and social and cultural cohesion (Nunn and Wantchekon 2011; Whatley and Gillezeau 2011; Whatley 2014), further fueling cultural erosion and population collapse. Unsurprisingly, communities that bore the brunt of slaving during the 16th-to-18th century continue to be negatively affected up to this day (Gerschman 2020; Whatley 2022).

The existence of targeted slaving zones is the most convincing explanation for the radically divergent effects of the Scythian presence in various Eastern Central European landscapes in the late sixth century BCE (Figure 19). To recapitulate: In Poland, for instance, regions southeast of the Vistula populations with traditionally close cultural bonds to the steppes show no impact of raiding, while there is drastic evidence for raiding in neighbouring Western regions like the Silesian Oder Basin, whose population has deep ties to the central European Hallstatt circle. Silesia and the neighbouring Western Polish lowlands were not only raided but also depopulated by the end of the sixth century BCE. Similar patterns of Scythian impact can be seen in the Western Carpathian Basin: lowland regions in Transdanubia and Lower Austria suffer massive destructive raiding, drastic depopulation, cultural fragmentation, and replacement. In stark contrast, rugged uplands show evidence of stable populations experiencing cultural continuity, and no discernable negative impact affects the steppe allied cultures of the Great Hungarian Plain and Transylvania.

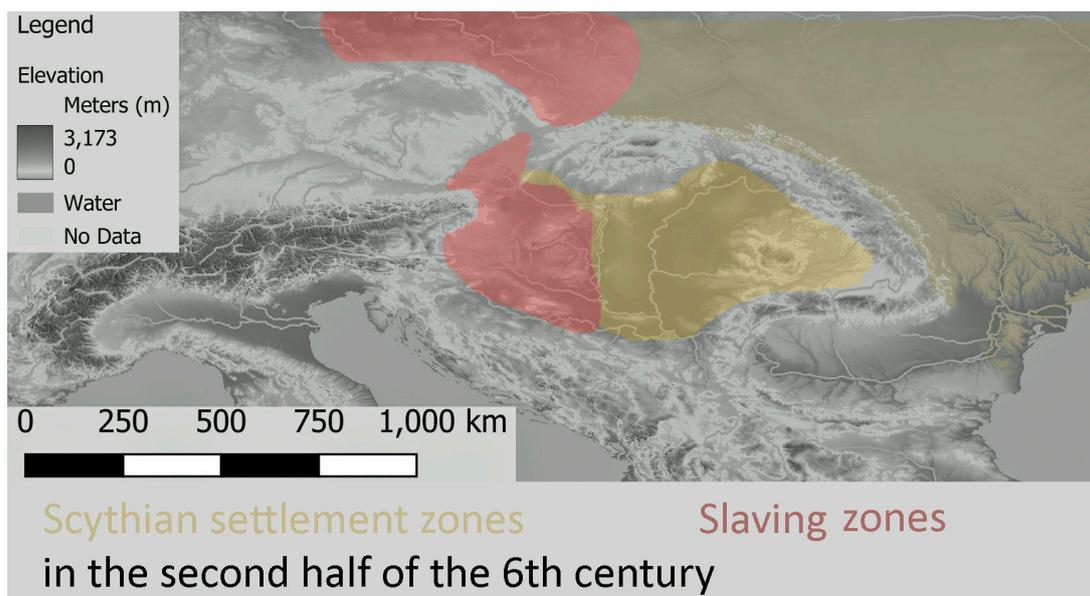


Figure 19. Scythian settlement and slaving zones in the 6th century BCE.

5.4. *The Oyo, West Africa's Steppe Slavers*

Besides these general similarities, a very specific parallel with the European situation may have more anecdotal than systematic value. That is, the emergence of the Oyo Empire at the turn of the 17th century (Law 1977; Ogundiran 2012) in today's Northern Nigeria. Like the sixth-century Scythian polities, the success of this highly organised centralised state, which was the largest of the Yoruba kingdoms, was linked to territorial expansion, raiding, and attendant commercial slaving. It based its success on an army that included a highly effective cavalry of mounted spearmen, as well as archers. Their horses were bred and maintained in the northern savanna and used for highly effective invasions in the neighbouring forest zone, where these mounted warriors raided for slaves (Law 1975). Their captives were sold to Saharan traffickers as well as to the slave markets on the Atlantic coast. Interestingly, and this is another parallel to the situation in Iron Age Europe, Oyo's horse-born warriors had heterogeneous backgrounds, and many of them were former slaves.

5.5. *Rugged Refuges*

The mountainous regions of Eastern Central Europe, like the Slovenian and Moravian highlands, experienced no noticeable negative impact from Scythian raiding (see above). In West Africa, rugged landscapes also protected sedentary communities from predatory raiding. Oyo's mounted army, for instance, was a lethal force in open agricultural landscapes but ineffective in hilly forested countryside where it often faced defeat (Law 1975). Rugged areas on the East African littoral were also systematically avoided by commercial slavers since both access to and the extraction of slaves from rangy terrain were dangerous and complicated (Nunn and Puga 2012).

6. Conclusions

The gold treasure farmer Lauschke ploughed up from his soggy field 150 km southeast of Berlin was the regalia of a noble Scythian from the Pontic littoral. Crucial to understanding the background of the deposition of these regalia in the Far West is the fact that golden akinakai, neck rings, and courtly costumes were standard diplomatic presents gifted by Persian rulers to loyal servants or allies (Ellis 2021, pp. 79–83; see also Moshtagh Khorasani 2006, pp. 75, 407 cat. no. 49). The recipients were then designated as friends of the king, and wearing their gifts enhanced their status within the Achaemenid court's hierarchy (Sancisi-Weerdenburg 1989; Briant 2002, pp. 304–15; Miller 2010; Wright and Hollman

2021). Artapatēs, Cyrus the Younger’s favourite courtier, for instance, “had an akinakes of gold, and he also wore a necklace and bracelets and all the other ornaments that the noblest Persians wear; for he had been honoured by Cyrus because of his affection and fidelity” (Xenophon, *Anabasis*. 1.8.27–29). The westernmost Persian export in the fifth century is a precious glass bowl from a rich early fifth-century BCE grave in Ihringen in the Upper Rhine Basin. While this may reflect the expansion of Achaemenid gifting to the Far West, it is more likely that the bowl was handed westward down the diplomatic line (Kistler 2010). Although ample evidence exists for obviously gifted ostentatious Persian weapons and tableware in Scythian contexts, dating back to the sixth century BCE (Treister 2010; Rehm 2010), the Witaszkowo hoard was clearly not a Persian gift. It is best explained as a diplomatic gift from a ruler whose regal iconography was rooted in the Ionian–Scythian ambience of the western Pontic littoral. In particular, Milesian agency can be suspected, as, like the Persians, they also conflated diplomatic ties between polities with personal bonds between their rulers. These bonds were inevitably underscored by gifting (Tausend 1992, pp. 96f., 199f.; Wagner-Hasel 2006; Tsatskheladze 2010). Before their disastrous rebellion in 496 BCE, the tyrants of Miletus were vassals closely allied to the Persian court. It is highly likely that, encouraged by the Persians (Nielsing 2010) and facilitated by Persia’s Scythian allies (Beckwith 2023), the Milesians and their Thracian and Pontic colonies were involved in a massive program of expansion and territorial consolidation, accompanied by systematic slaving (Kerschner 2005; Badian 2007; Greaves 2007; Nielsing 2010, pp. 124–27) in this hotly contested periphery of the civilised world (Chase-Dunn and Hall 1997, p. 37). The increasingly hollowed-out slaving zones, leaving large swaths of Eastern Central Europe virtually depopulated with thoroughly degraded martial hierarchies and defensive infrastructure, would function as protective marches or buffer zones separating the projected European domains of the Achaemenid’s Scythian allies from the martial societies of Western and Northern Europe (Figure 20).

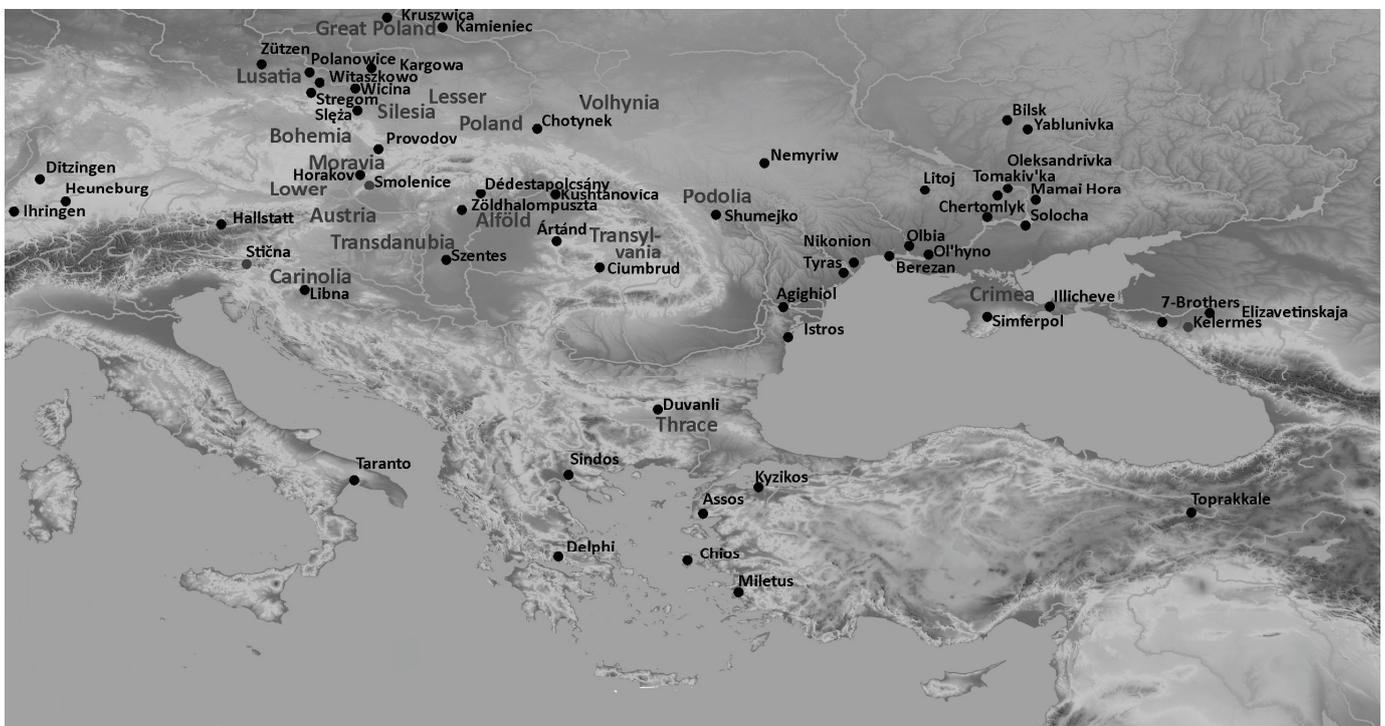


Figure 20. Map of the major sites and regions mentioned in the text.

Analogous to early modern Western Africa, such goals could only have been realised with the help of local allies (Heywood 2009). As Denis Topal has pointed out, gilded Scythica regularly turns up on the outer fringes of the Scythian world, pointing to analogous

gifting strategies by the elites of the steppes (Topal 2018). In the case of the Witaszkowo hoard, the Lusatian leader designated to receive this spectacular gift was likely embroiled in the mercurial and duplicitous shadow world of violence and deceit that invariably accompanies slaving.

Instead of donning these regalia and embodying the allegiances it entailed, this member of the Stary Kraj elite followed his religious duty and performed a regionally typical material sacrifice on the banks of the Kozów wetland and spring, releasing the fish and its glittering accessories into the water.

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Conflicts of Interest: The author declares no conflict of interest.

Note

¹ In this article, the term “Scythian” refers to the Early Iron Age steppe cultures of Eastern Europe as a whole, rather than a specific ethnic group. Other terminologies are perhaps more accurate but much too wordy. This article, which is a compacted and updated version of an article written in 2022, was completed thanks to the encouragement and patience of Caspar Meyer and is dedicated to our many Ukrainian colleagues who are risking their lives defending their country and its heritage.

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