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Motif of the „Miracle rain“ from the column of Marcus Aurelius in Rome. In the window: Relief from the Athena-Temple, Pergamon

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ARMS AND ARMOUR THROUGH THE AGES
(From the Bronze Age to the Late Antiquity)

Modra-Harmónia, 19th-22nd November 2005

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Preface

ANODOS 4-5/2004-2005 contains 23 contributions in English, German and French presented at the international symposium "Arms and Armour through the Ages. From the Bronze Age to the Late Antiquity" in Modra-Harmónia on November 19-21, 2005. It was the 3rd event of this kind organized by the Department of Classical Archaeology of the University of Trnava. Two partner institutions from Turkey - Selçuk University, Konya and Uludağ University, Bursa - took part in the organization for the first time. The Slovak Archaeological Society at the Slovak Academy of Sciences cooperated as traditionally. Participants were scholars from 10 European countries and overseas (Turkey, Greece, Italy, Slovenia, Hungary, Poland, the Czech Republic, Germany, Great Britain and USA), graduate and post-graduate students from Trnava and Vienna, and other guests.

Ing. Vladimír Medlen, mayor of the town of Modra, welcomed the participants. At the end of the symposium, an excursion to the Archaeological Museum of the Slovak National Museum in Bratislava was arranged. Participants had opportunity to see contemporary exhibition "The Sword. The Beginnings of Swords in Slovakia" and permanent exhibitions of the museum.

The symposium was arranged with the support of the Slovak Grant Agency VEGA (Projects Nos. 1/0456/03 and 2/3172/23), The Nuclear Power Plant Research Institute (VÚJE Trnava), the town of Modra, Enterprise Baliarne obchodu a.s. Poprad and other sponsors.

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Editors

Trnava, December 1, 2006

Iron scabbard-plates decorated in openwork technique (*opus interrasile*) in Central Europe. Celtic import or locally made copy?

Tomasz Bochnak and Katarzyna Czarnecka

Keywords: Celtic weaponry, Przeworsk culture, imports, scabbard, open work decoration

Abstract: Celtic swords' scabbards decorated with mainly bronze plates made in open work (*opus interrasile*) technique fixed to the upper part of a scabbard appeared at the time around the birth of Christ on a vast area from the west of Rhine through middle Europe to Bulgaria and Slovenia. The considerable part of these sheaths was discovered on the non-Celtic territories of the central and northern Europe, where they are treated as Celtic imports. Some, but not numerous, of openwork plates similar to undoubtedly Celtic objects found in area of the Przeworsk culture are made of iron - material typical for the Przeworsk culture - and considered to be a locally made imitation of Celtic products. Fragments of iron sheets with cut out ornament were discovered at the end of 19th century by J. G. Bulliot in the remains of workshop site in Bibracte (Mont Beuvray). We suggest that described openwork sheets from Bibracte could serve as scabbard-mouth decoration and they prove the possibility of Celtic origin of iron open work decorations.

The complex problem of mutual relationships between Celtic and Germanic worlds in central Europe at the time around the birth of Christ has been the case of studies and a discussion for a long time and still requires further researches. Celtic civilization had lasted for centuries, bordering from the north and the east the central European tribes defined as the Jastorf circle, and further east on the Pomeranian and Cloche graves cultures, and still further Zarubintsy culture, however not before the formation of the Przeworsk culture in the 3rd century BC the distinct expansion - probably not the expansion of people - but of Celtic influences can be noticed. The so called "Laténisierung" or Celtisation process means receiving these influences in a very wide spectrum from acquiring the knowledge of iron production, through adoption of particular forms of ornaments, tools and weapons to changes in burial rite. Equally intriguing is the question of what in turn the Celts adopted from the Germans.

The most interesting and worthy of observing is the influence that the Celts had on weaponry of their neighbours. It seems that single-edged swords with characteristic scabbards are undoubtedly Germanic element of military equipment, while double-edged swords are without doubt typical of the Celts. However double-edged swords are very often found on the Germanic cultures territories, beyond the La Tène culture area¹. Here arises the question of whether all of them are imports or perhaps they could have been produced locally. We touch here upon a broader and unfortunately still unsatisfactorily investigated subject of Celtic imports: import of objects - or import of "know how". There is a question if all the double-edged swords are of Celtic origin, or did imported swords made locally have sheaths. A good example of such problem is the case of a special form of scabbards decorated in *opus interrasile* technique.

With the end of the La Tène period, (around the birth of Christ), when the expansion of Rome reached further to the Celtic territories, a very interesting element occurred in weaponry - ornamented swords' scabbards, in general made of bronze, and decorated with an openwork plates fixed in the upper part (fig. 1: 1-3). In this way ornamented sheaths appear on a vast area from the territories situated to the west of Rhine through middle Europe to Bulgaria and Slovenia (fig. 2). Many of them were found on the territories occupied by Germanic tribes of the Elbian circle, the Przeworsk and Oksywie cultures, in Scandinavia, and single specimens on the area of Dacians - Lipitsa culture. Nevertheless territorial distribution may to a certain degree result from the state of researches.

¹ Bochnak 2005, 23-60, 154-64.

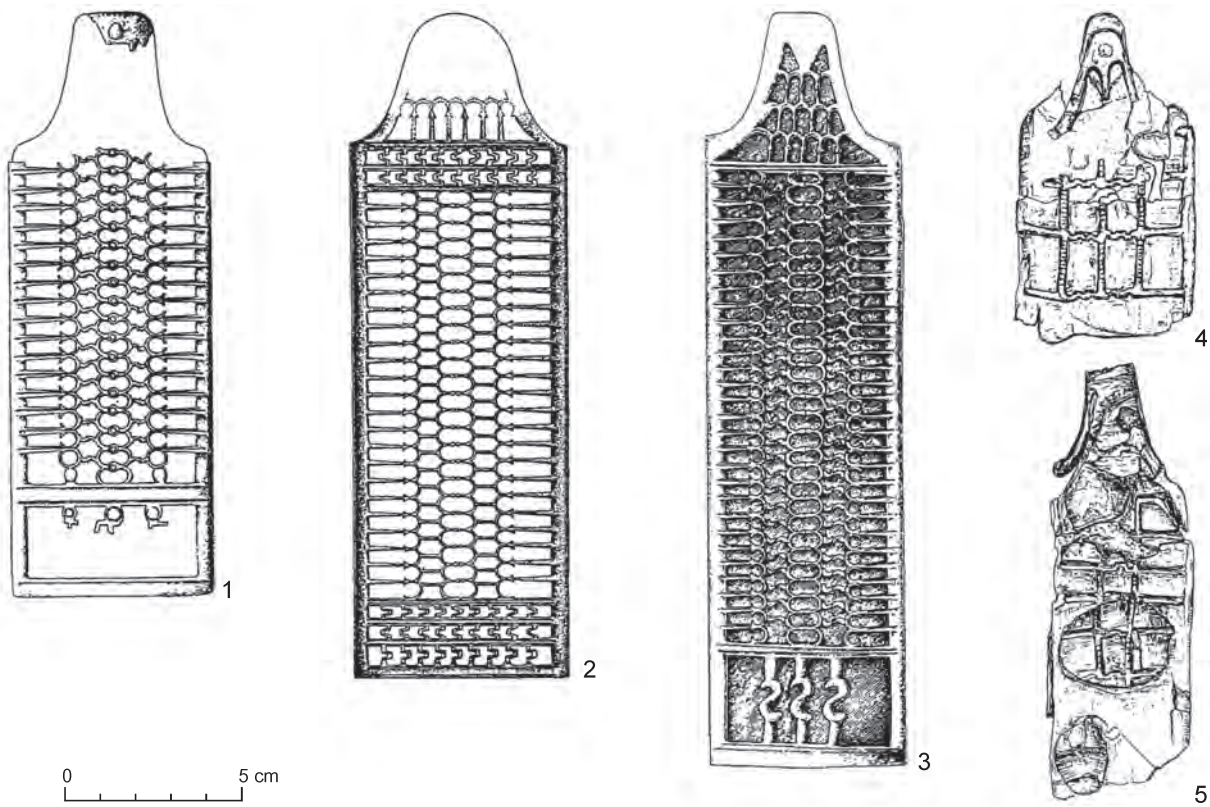


Fig. 1. Scabbards with openwork decoration: 1 - Wederath (Germany), gr. 784; 2 - Badenheim (Germany), gr. 67; 3 - Goeblingen-Nospelt (Luxembourg), gr. B; 4 - Oblin (Poland), gr. 297; 5 - Oblin (Poland), gr. 282 (1-3 copper alloy; 4, 5 - iron).

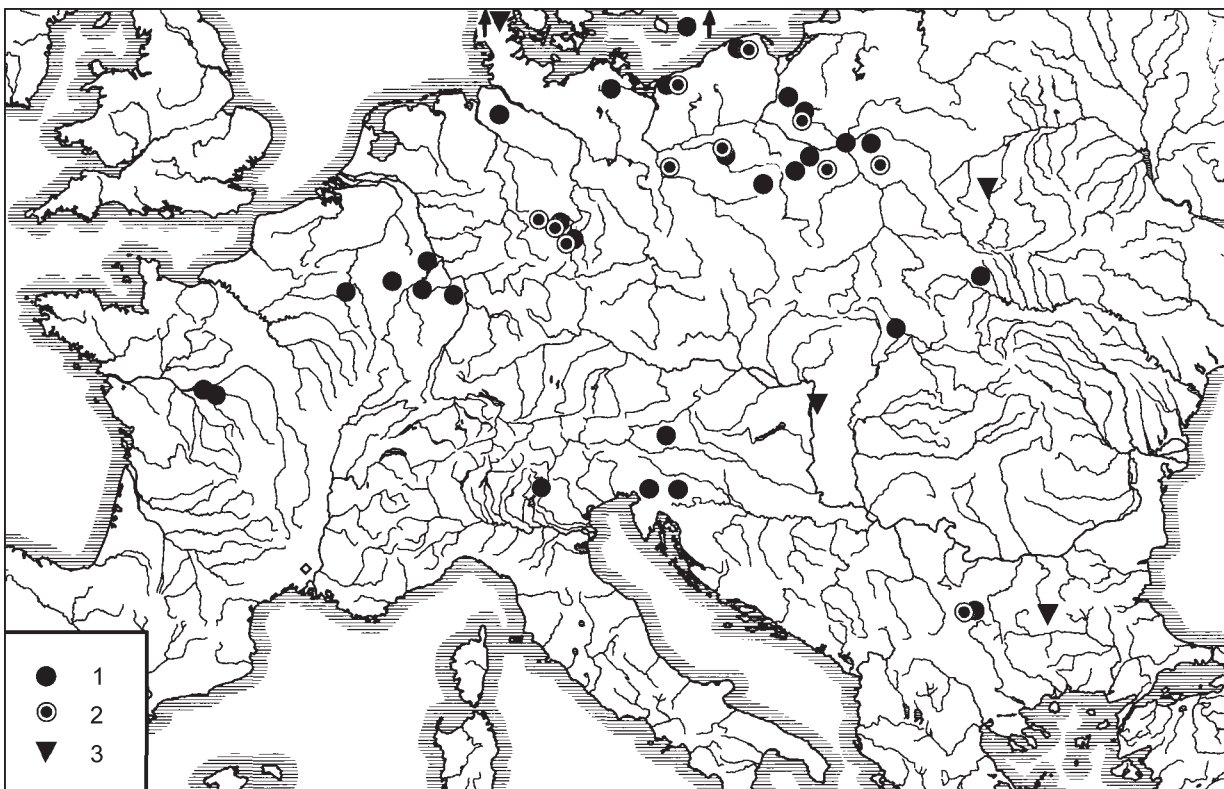


Fig. 2. Distribution of scabbards decorated in openwork technique. 1 - elaborated opus interrasile; 2 - grid pattern; 3 - "Sonderformen" (special forms).

The mentioned scabbards were the subject of interest of researchers and several elaborations were devoted to them, though many questions still remain without answers². Scabbards with decorative openwork are known from approximately 30 sites³. Although there are many similarities between them, they show some detailed differences, as well. Both J. Werner and A. Böhme-Schönberger see two main types of openwork plates distinctly divided stylistically and in case of the second group territorially, too. The first group form richly ornamented and scrupulously produced specimens with the openwork plate usually made of bronze, rarely of silver and exceptionally made of iron, decorated with complex motifs (arcade shaped elements etc.), that undoubtedly required possessing of great technical skills and specific tools to be made. Against J. Werner's suggestions ornaments were cut out, not cast⁴. The second group form scabbards decorated with openwork plain grid pattern, made solely of iron, known from Germanic regions and considered (to begin with J. Werner) to be local imitation of more complicated imported forms (fig 1: 4, 5)⁵.

It is possible to distinguish, but with certain caution, so far unnoticed type of sheath's fittings, usually made of bronze sheet with overlapped openwork plate with the decoration in the form of strips of small rectangles forming the grid pattern, however more ornamented and developed than usual „Gittermuster“ known from Germanic territories and without elements in shape of arcades, vases and pearly rungs. Sheaths from Szentendre⁶, Lučka⁷ and probably those from Sofia Podueni⁸ and Kostievo⁹ would belong to this group¹⁰.

Among these more decorated sheaths we can distinguish several types of arrangements of ornament details and the ways of finishing off the scabbard's mouth¹¹. We can also distinguish more ornamented specimens among simple ornaments of the grid pattern. These dissimilarities may suggest different workshops or workshops' circles. Some of them worked undoubtedly in Noricum but others could have been located in the lower Rhine area.

The majority of discussed sheaths, both those with ornamented plate and those with plain grid pattern, consist of two iron sheets, covered with bronze sheet (generally from external side only); there are sheaths completely made of bronze as well. In general the same type of sheaths' construction, but without the bronze sheet, exists in the sheaths-with-grid pattern group. In nearly two thirds of the length of a sheath the side fittings are joined with thickly arranged transverse elements forming a ladder. It is hard to say whether this was a technical requirement whose aim was to strengthen the construction of the sheath or purely stylistic one - such "fashion". This type of scabbards was most often closed with a pointed chape, "Sporenformige" (fig. 3), although there are examples of scabbards with rungs with the boat-shaped chape, "Nachenformige"¹², but they are probably a little bit earlier or at least (as in the Badenheim example) consciously referring to earlier forms. Among 13 preserved chapes on scabbards of discussed type, 9 are of the "Sporenformige" type. Another, probably later type, is a chape formed by folding the lower sheet

² Werner 1977; Böhme-Schönberger 1998; Lejars 2003, 35, 69, fig. 22.

³ Czarnecka 2002.

⁴ Böhme-Schönberger 1998, 250.

⁵ As "Sonderform" special forms we should treat plates from Zemplín, grave 108 (Budinský-Krička and Lamiová-Schmiedlová 1990, pl. XV: 31) and from Harsefeld (Wegewitz 1937, pl. 16: VIII: 2246 b) which look like semi-finished products. It seems though, that because they were fixed to the scabbards and even bear traces of being in use (?), their producers (or users) assumed that those were finished objects.

⁶ Hunyady 1942, pl. 44: 5.

⁷ Śmiszko 1932, pl. V: 16.

⁸ Popov 1921, fig. 34.

⁹ Tackenberg 1929, fig. 135.

¹⁰ Distinguished by J. Werner (1977, 381) "Wabenmuster" ornament type seems in fact to be the result of slapdash, simplified drawings in publications that do not render all the details of the ornament, what A. Böhme-Schönberger (1998, 226) drew attention to, or as in case of the sheath from Kolonia-Stara Wieś, over interpretation of the author of a drawing, who recreated the whole form from single preserved elements (Kaszewska 1977, fig. 3: 1).

¹¹ Böhme-Schönberger 1998, 230.

¹² E. g. Badenheim, grave 67 (Böhme-Schönberger 1998, pl. 4).

over the upper one: Zemplín, grave 108¹³, Šmarjeta¹⁴, perhaps Belozem as well¹⁵. They are placed on scabbards of slightly different construction - with sparsely located rungs.

As the considerable part of these sheaths was discovered on the non-Celtic territories, one of the main research problems is who and where produced them. J. Werner¹⁶ indicated Noricum, yet after it became occupied by Rome, as the place of production of highly sophisticated ornamented scabbards. He considered at the same time plain grid pattern and less scrupulously made specimens to be local, non-Celtic (Germanic) imitations¹⁷. A. Böhme-Schönberger¹⁸ rightly claimed that scabbards decorated in this way are Celtic workshops' products, not Roman. Not only the selection of decoration elements (S-shaped elements, pearly rungs) known from the Celtic art suggests that but first and foremost the construction of the sheath itself¹⁹.

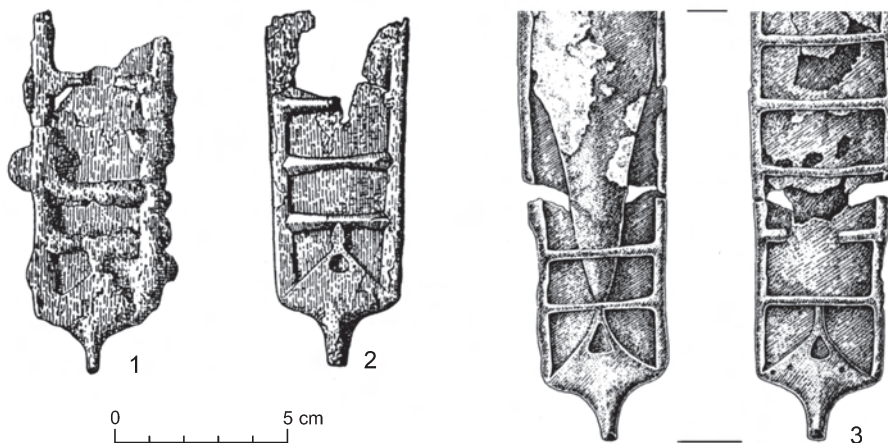


Fig. 3. Scabbards with pointed chape. 1 - Stara Wieś (Poland), gr. 19; 2 - Stara Wieś (Poland), stray find; 3 - Büchel (Germany) (1-3 iron).

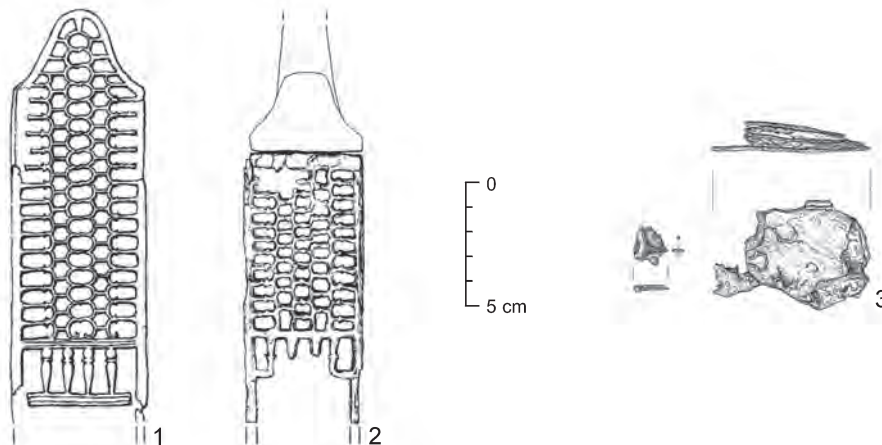


Fig. 4. Scabbards with iron opus interrasilis decoration. 1 - Kamińczyk (Poland), gr. 301; 2 - Wesółki (Poland), gr. 3; 3 - Janówek Pierwszy (Poland), gr. 66.

¹³ Budinský-Krička and Lamiová-Schmiedlová 1990, pl. XV: 31.

¹⁴ Werner 1977, fig. 1: 1.

¹⁵ Péev 1926, fig. 11, 12.

¹⁶ Werner 1977, 376.

¹⁷ Werner 1977, 383.

¹⁸ Böhme-Schönberger 1998, 243.

¹⁹ Łuczkiwicz 1997, 193 sees in majority of scabbards local Germanic products, which is rather doubtful, and indicates the necessity of adopting the tools and technology by local blacksmiths.

Bronze plates with complicated arcade shaped openwork, which required quite a lot of skill and specific tools, are rather unquestionably Celtic. Plain iron grid pattern are for sure within Germanic blacksmiths' capabilities and the fact of their distribution only within the free Germania cultures suggests with high certainty that these are local products.

A very interesting is the issue of openwork plates made of iron (fig. 4). They are not numerous and up till now they were considered to be a local production. It seems though that such a simple division: iron means local (Germanic); bronze means Celtic - is no longer to be sustained. Iron complicated openwork (resembling bronze example - arcades, pearly rungs) preserved in good condition is known only from Kamieńczyk, grave 301 (fig. 4: 1)²⁰ and most likely from Wesółki, grave 3 (fig. 4: 2)²¹, although here iron was presumably covered with copper or bronze, traces of which are clearly visible on the surface, and that is why the plate of this scabbard used to be defined as bronze²². Tiny fragments of iron openwork - so not providing the bases for reconstruction - are found on partially preserved sword in a sheath from Janówek (fig. 4: 3)²³ and similar on a preserved piece of iron sheet from grave 1928 from Gross Romsted, that contained a sword in a sheath with rungs²⁴.

Hitherto arguments for the local production of scabbards decorated with iron openwork indicated using iron - material supposedly less willingly or not at all used by the Celts for the production of this kind of objects. This was supported by the fact of using the pointed chape, "Sporenformige" type. Most researchers²⁵ put them down to Germans. This type of chapes is even treated as a determinant of Germanic weaponry. That is why the sheath from Kamieńczyk - iron with the pointed chape - was described as local imitation or must have been made for local commission in Przeworsk culture's favourite raw materials²⁶. With the increase in sources these arguments can however be refuted, at least they should be rediscussed. Pointed chapes, "Sporenformige" type, are indeed most common on the Przeworsk and Oksywie cultures territories, not seldom in the Elbian circle (nearly all scabbards decorated with plain grid pattern have this kind of chapes), but they are also found in this period on genuinely Celtic areas (Büchel²⁷, Kostievo²⁸, also Verdun, Bad Nauheim, Mesnil-sous-Jumièges²⁹) and undoubtedly cannot be the determinant of local Germanic production³⁰. The other argument for local production, material used - iron, is also not convincing. Iron is not typical entirely of the Przeworsk culture or other Germans. We know evidently Celtic openwork made of iron.

There should yet be recalled that we know numerous examples of objects made of openwork iron sheet from the territories occupied by the Celts, as well. We can mention for instance parts of belt fittings from grave 67A in Les Rouliers³¹, from barrow I in Hochscheid³² and many other Celtic culture sites dated back to the early La Tène period³³. The ability of openwork iron sheets carving survived in Celtic environment in subsequent stages of the early La Tène period too. Ornamental carts' fittings from Heimbach-Weis³⁴ and from Boé³⁵ speak well for it.

²⁰ Dąbrowska 1997, pl. CXXXVIII: 4.

²¹ Dąbrowski 1967, fig. 7: 8.

²² The publication lacks material definition, J. Werner (1977) defines it as bronze, I. Głowacka (1979) as iron, T. Dąbrowska (1988) probably after I. Głowacka, as iron, exactly the same restates Łuczkiwicz (1997, table 1).

²³ Czarnecka and Prochowicz 2002, fig. 6.

²⁴ Peschel 1990, pl. 84, the described fragment is not illustrated.

²⁵ Jahn 1916, 105; Kostrzewski 1919, 95; Frey 1986, 45; Dąbrowska 1988, 136.

²⁶ Dąbrowska 1988, 137.

²⁷ Böhme-Schönberger 2002, fig. 7: 6.

²⁸ Tackenberg 1929, fig. 135.

²⁹ Schaaf 1986.

³⁰ A. Böhme-Schönberger discussed that problem presenting very illustrative, although not complete map (Böhme-Schönberger 2002, 206, fig. 6).

³¹ Rozoy 1987, 345, fig. 292.

³² Haffner 1991, 158.

³³ Megaw and Megaw 1990; Beneš and Sankot 1997.

³⁴ Haffner and Joachim 1984, 80, 86; fig. 15.

³⁵ Schönfelder 2002, 119-23, 211-3, 215, fig. 78-80, 131.

On the scabbard of the sword from Esvre-sur-Indre (Vaugrignon) there is openwork iron plate with circular motif³⁶. The grave is dated to the time around the birth of Christ. From the same region (central France, Touraine) comes the scabbard with bronze openwork from the grave from Palluau-sur-Indre and partially preserved iron openwork from Saint-Etienne-au-Temple³⁷. In the publication both are dated on grounds of sword's form only to the La Tène I phase. The openwork motif resembles the one mentioned above from Esvre-sur-Indre.

Fragments of iron sheets with cut out ornament were discovered in Mont Beuvray, on the site generally identified with Bibracte - main oppidum of the Celtic tribe Edui, known from Caesar's and Strabo's works. Jacques Gabriel Bulliot who excavated this site from 1867 to 1895, in the part of the site known as Côme Chaudron encountered the remains of several foundations of a workshop character. In the feature indicated by CC (Côme Chaudron) 35, among numerous finds that confirm developed metallurgical activity (tools, fragments of crucibles, furnaces) lower part of amphora was discovered. It was dug into the ground and according to J. G. Bulliot was used as a waste container for unsuccessful or unfinished products etc. There were pieces of fibula, rings, narrow iron cuttings in this vessel and several objects described in the publication as *pieces of iron sheets formed by forging, and then decorated with openwork ornament, resembling [...] Gothic arcades of cloister garth [...] or metal kerosene lamp light bowl holder* (fig. 5, 6)³⁸. Description seems a little bit enigmatical but unpublished drawings that document J. G. Bulliot's excavations, now stored in Société Eduenne in Autun, let us unequivocally state that those wastes were *opus interrasile* sheets³⁹.

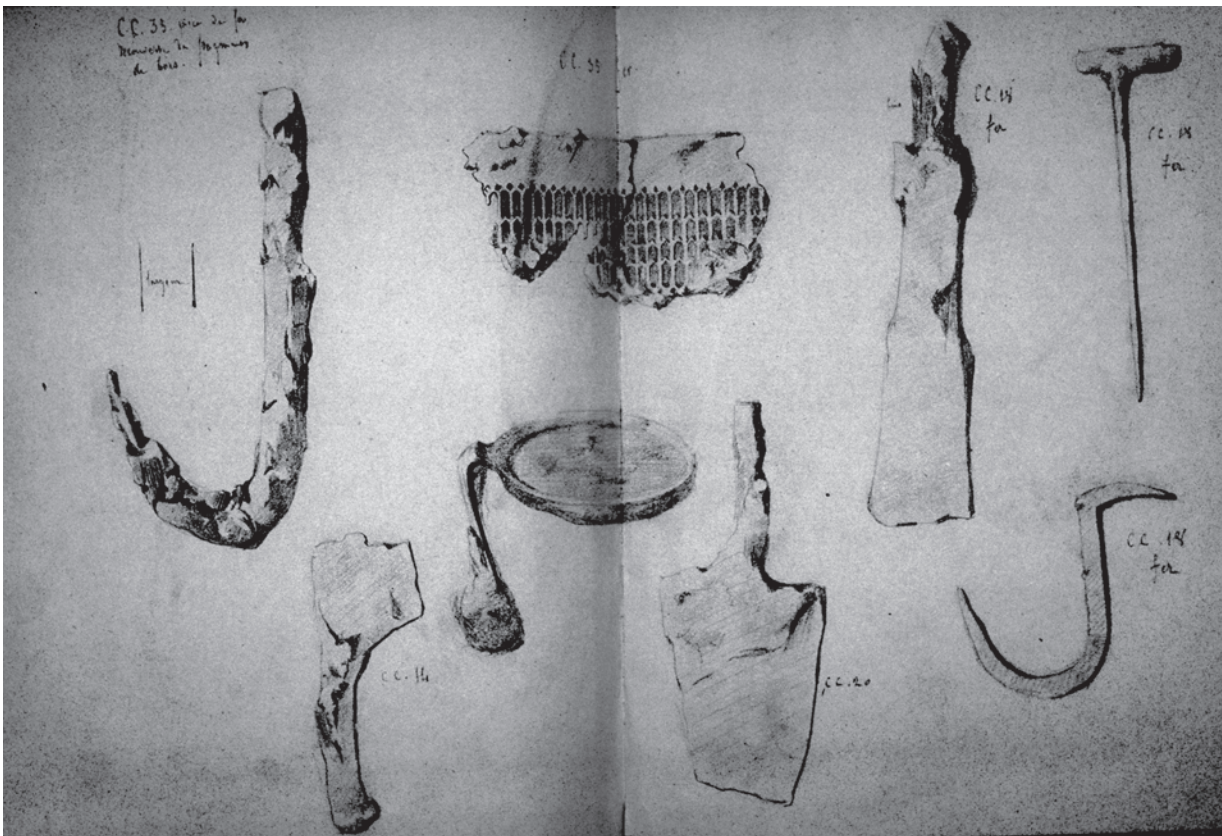


Fig. 5. Archival documentation of J. G. Bulliot researches, years 1867-1895. Accessible by courtesy of the Centre archéologique européen du Mont Beuvray.

³⁶ Exposition Bibracte 2005, 12.

³⁷ Coulon and Cufez 1976, fig. 2, 3; Bulard 1980, 44.

³⁸ Bulliot 1899, 169-70.

³⁹ We would like to thank Prof. Jean-Paul Guillaumet and Centre archéologique européen du Mont Beuvray for the possibility of presenting these materials.

Unfortunately the methods of conservation used at the end of the 19th century did not prevent presented finds from fast destruction and photographs in the Thiollier brothers' album from 1899 show merely fragmentary preserved pieces⁴⁰ (fig. 7). Nowadays only tiny remains of sheets discovered by J. G. Bulliot survived in Musée Rolin in Autun.

Excavation methods used by J. G. Bulliot in many cases make it impossible to precisely state the chronological position of particular finds. This remark refers to *opus interrasile* sheets from Bibracte as well. The fundamental premise to date the CC 35 workshop is *terra sigillata* found inside it, with the stamp L•TETI SAMIA that is dated to the last two decades before Christ⁴¹. To reliably fix the chronology of the finds from the CC 35 workshop the certainty is crucial that this was a single-phase building. J. G. Bulliot's work lacks this information. The results of researches conducted nowadays in Côme Chaudron sector indicate that single-phased as well as multi-phased buildings were raised and some of them were used in the second half of the 1st century before Christ.

Saved drawings from the Société Eduénne collection let us formulate several remarks about the Bibracte finds. Preserved sheets were 5-6 cm wide, so slightly wider than typical scabbards from La Tène D2 phase. It may not be excluded that for practical reasons it was more comfortable to make the whole openwork on initially prepared piece of sheet that in the end was shaped to its precise dimensions, including the necessity to leave broader side margins to

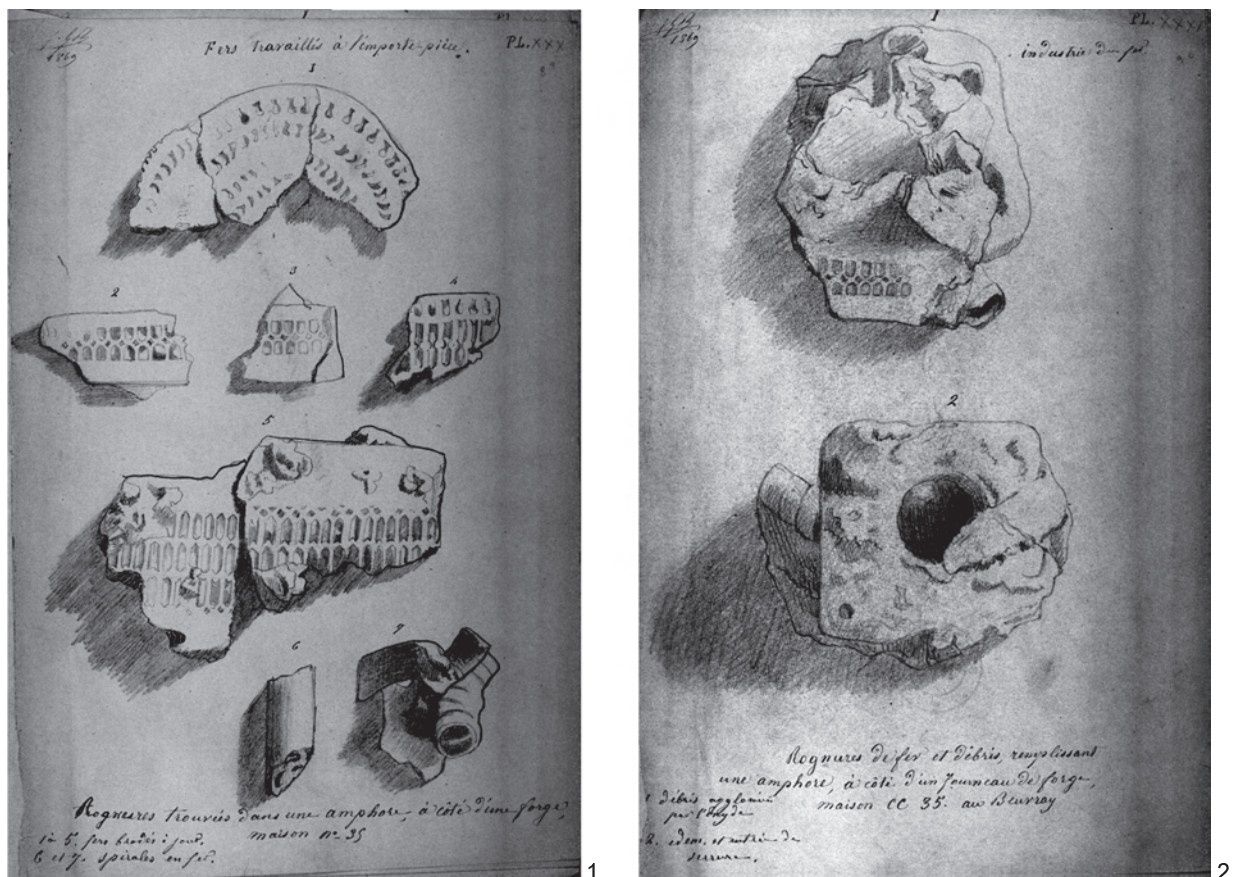


Fig. 6. Archival documentation of J. G. Bulliot researches, years 1867-1895. Accessible by courtesy of the Centre archéologique européen du Mont Beuvray. 1 - Rognures trouvées dans une amphore à côté d'une forge. Maison no 35. 1 à 5. fer brodés à jour. 6 et 7. spirales en fer (original description in documentation); 2 - Rognures de fer et débris remplissant une amphore à côté d'un fourneau de forge. Maison CC 35 au Beuvray (original description in documentation).

⁴⁰ Thiollier 1899, pl. XLIV: 4, 5, 8.

⁴¹ Oxé 1968, 453-9.

set up the facing. Sheaths with overlapped *opus interrabile* applications differs much; even more than it is in case of applications. It needs to be mentioned that we also know quite many sheaths with ladder shaped mountings but without the ornamented plate in the upper part⁴². It cannot be excluded that those scabbards originally had some decoration that could get destroyed⁴³. The plate itself was undoubtedly made separately and fixed to the finished sheath. Perhaps the "standard scabbard" was produced separately and its upper part could be decorated with openwork plate or not, depending on financial abilities or preferences of a person who ordered it. In majority of swords the plates were fixed by laying on the upper scabbard's sheets and bending down. Entitled is therefore the hypothesis that assumes that scabbards and applications were produced in different workshops and the fitting up took place later on. We know the example of repeated fitting up of the facing to the sheath from Eggeby⁴⁴.

The Bibracte specimens are, stylistically close to those from Sofia-Podueni and Zaguminki-Zvenigorod⁴⁵. We suggest that described openwork sheets could serve as scabbard-mouth decoration and they prove the possibility of Celtic origin of iron openwork decorations. Basing on above mentioned pieces of information we can ascertain that *opus interrabile* plate on the sheath from Kamińczyk, grave 301 (as perhaps the whole sheath) is the Celtic import, and the fact that it was made of iron cannot be the argument for its local provenance.

Independent of metal used, precisely carved openwork ornament suggests the very high level of skills of craftsmen who were doing the plates and their masterly acquisition of diverse instrumentarium serving to work out particular elements of the facing. It needs to be stressed that iron facings as well as bronze or silver ones were produced by craftsmen that had similar set of tools and equally high level of skills at their disposal. Technological differences concern raw materials used only. Inconsiderable thickness of plates causes that bronze and iron working does not involve different tools.

The vast majority of Przeworsk culture artefacts (for instance majority of types of fibulae, double-edged swords) in Celtic environment would not be distinguished as imports from Polish territories but would have the local product status. In relation to the Przeworsk culture materials (especially metal products) it is extremely difficult to ascertain when we deal with an import and when with its imitation or even copy. Many a time with similar difficulties meet weaponry history experts. As an example we can mention 17th century sabres, imported to the Polish territory from Turkey, and sometimes from France, too. Greek and Armenian craftsmen settled down in Lvov used to remake Turkish sabres, mainly by using oriental ornamental techniques and imported from the East gem and semi-precious

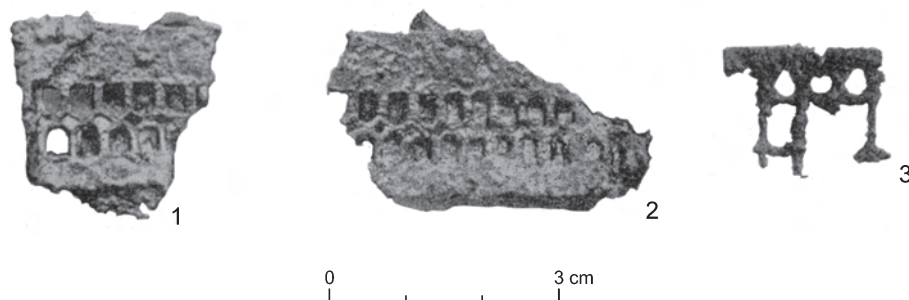


Fig. 7. Pieces of iron openwork sheets from the CC 35 feature. According to Thiollier 1899, pl. XLIV: 4, 5, 8.

⁴² From Celtic areas - Bad Nauheim, Verdun and more than ten from non Celtic (Germanic) territories (Czarnecka 2002, 95).

⁴³ In case of Korytnica, grave 4, there is a trace suggesting that there could have been bronze openwork that didn't preserve (Głowacka 1979). It cannot be excluded that similar situation took place in case of many others.

⁴⁴ Böhme-Schönberger 1998, 233; fig. 4; 2001.

⁴⁵ Svešnikov 1957, fig. 21: 1.

stones or even finished fittings⁴⁶. Also ammunition pouches, saddles, brassards and other elements of weaponry and harness equipment that were produced in Lvov with the thought of local customers, were decorated with ornaments using oriental motifs for example Persian with the elements adopted from baroque decorative art of the Latin culture⁴⁷.

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⁴⁶ Bocheński 1957/58, 95; Ostrowski and Bochnak 1979, 233-4, 237.

⁴⁷ Bocheński 1957/58, 95, 98.

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