

Early Medieval Ornamented Axes from the Territory of Poland

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Abstract

Among over 900 early medieval axes found in the territory of Poland only 27 have some kind of ornaments. Within them we can identify axes with different decoration techniques: engraving, punching or inlay. This small group of artefacts is connected with the most interesting problem which can be discussed in the area of technological, symbolic, religious and social issues. Therefore, we can suggest that ornamented axes had a special destination and was precious for its owners. It is confirmed by the most popular opinion that they were associated with the social elite of early medieval Europe. Axes were symbols of power, rank and wealth. But, what is interesting, some of researchers think that they could be connected with cult of Pagan gods – Perun and Perkun. The others consider that they were the attributes of Saint Olaf.

The most interesting problem which can be discussed in the area of technological, symbolic, religious and social issues, concerns the decoration of weapons. Among several categories of weapons whose attractiveness was emphasized by using various motifs and decorative techniques, there can be found battle-axes and axes as well.

The matter of the decoration of this kind of weapon has generated much interest for a long time¹. Before the Second World War it was discussed in the prestigious monograph of P. Paulsen, however, it rested on questionable methodical assumptions accepted a priori. These influenced the interpretation and conclusions drawn during the analysis². However the conclusions were less radical in the following post-war publication³. In the next years, by dint of the influx of new finds, the number of publications increased. Mainly Russian⁴, Scandinavian⁵, German⁶, Lithuanian⁷, and

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¹ Jentsch 1883; Спицын 1915; Городцов 1926; Новосадский 1930; Petersen 1936; La Baume 1941, p. 25-26.

² Paulsen 1939.

³ Paulsen 1956.

⁴ Даркевич 1961; Корзухина 1966; Макаров 1988; Кулаков 1991/1992; Артемьев 1994; Кулаков, Скворцов 2000.

⁵ Strömberg 1953; Fuglesang 1991; Gottlieb 1991; Nielsen 1991; Vellev 1991; Stamsø Munch 1993.

⁶ Biermann 2002; Raddatz 2002.

⁷ Казакиявичюс 1988, p. 76-78; Malonaitis 1998; Malonaitis 2002, p. 172-177, Fig. 5-7.