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SOME TYPES OF FIBULAE IN THE SOUTHWESTERN BALTIC AREA AND THEIR WESTERN PARALLELS

Michel M Kazanski

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SOME TYPES OF *FIBULAE* IN THE SOUTHWESTERN BALTIC AREA AND THEIR WESTERN PARALLELS

Fibulae of Western origin have long been identified in East Prussia¹. They are most characteristic of the Olsztyn group of the West Baltic archaeological culture located in Mazovia, i.e. at some distance from the Baltic shores. The majority of their Western parallels can be found in the inner-continental part of the Merovingian world, in Germany². This implies that Western *fibulae* were brought to Prussia via Central Europe and spread with the Baltic bearers of the Olsztyn group of the West Baltic culture. Yet stray finds of fasteners may be indicative of sea contacts over the North and Baltic Seas, which will be shown in this paper.

1. *Fibulae* of the Monsheim-Liebenau-West Stow type and their derivatives³ with a lozenge-shaped pin and a rectangular headplate, dated from 450/470 to 500/520, are typical for continental Saxons. Their main area covers the lower reaches of the rivers Elbe and Weser (fig. 2B). These *fibulae* and their imitations are well known in Sambia, Natangia (PL/RUS) and further east on the Curonian Lagoon (Kurshsky zaliv/Kurštu Martos/RUS/LIT) coast. *Fibulae* from Dollkeim/Kovrovo (Kaliningrad obl., Zelenogradsk district/RUS)⁴ (fig. 1, 1) can be cited as an example of finds in the Sambian peninsula. It can be assumed that *fibulae* of the Monsheim-Liebenau-West Stow type and their replicas spread along the seacoast, and that the »staging post« connecting the North and Baltic Sea segments of this route was located in the Schleswig area⁵.

2. *Fibulae* of the Breitenfurt type and their derivatives are also of Saxon origin and date from 450/470 to 500/520⁶. Their eastern form, known as »Pritzler-Perdhöl«, is best represented east of the Elbe river, in Holstein (fig. 2A). They (or their replicas) are also well known on the sites of East Prussia⁷, e.g. in the cemeteries of Dollkeim/Kovrovo and Schlakalken/Zaostrovye (Kaliningrad obl., Zelenogradsk district/RUS)⁸ (fig. 1, 2-6) belonging to the Dollkeim/Kovrovo culture of the West Balts (the *Aestii* recorded in the first half of the 6th century by Cassiodorus and Jordanes: Cassiodorus, *Variae* V.2; Jordanes, *Getica* 36), as well as on the Kurisches Haff coast. Probably, as was the case with the Monsheim *fibulae*, the fashion for these fasteners spread over the sea⁹. *Fibulae* of the Breitenfurt type and their derivatives date from 450/470 to 500/520, i.e. in the period E1 of the Western Baltic chronology¹⁰. This dating is substantiated by the finds of these *fibulae* in closed complexes containing amber beads with engraved decoration¹¹, e.g., in burial 33 of the Lauth/Bolshoe Isakovo cemetery (Kaliningrad obl., Gurievsk district/RUS)¹² or in burial 210 of the Eislieten/Geroiskoe-5 cemetery (Kaliningrad obl., Zelenogradsk district/RUS)¹³.

¹ See in more detail: Hilberg, *Masurische Bügelfibeln* 205-290.

² Hilberg, *Masurische Bügelfibeln* fig. 7, 51.

³ Kühn, *Bügelfibeln* 878-888; Böhme, *Ende der Römerherrschaft* 554-556.

⁴ Hilberg, *Masurische Bügelfibeln* pls 13, 99; 14, 100-106.

⁵ Kazanski/Mastykova, *Contacts* 120; Kazanski/Mastykova, *O morskikh kontaktah* 106. V. Hilberg expressed doubts about the existence of such a route: Hilberg, *Masurische Bügelfibeln* 207.

⁶ Kühn, *Bügelfibeln* 869-877; Böhme, *Ende der Römerherrschaft* 558.

⁷ Hilberg, *Masurische Bügelfibeln* 205-207 Fundliste 8.

⁸ Hilberg, *Masurische Bügelfibeln* pls 13, 95-97. 108-109; 34, 300.

⁹ Kazanski/Mastykova, *Contacts* 120.

¹⁰ Kowalski, *Chronologia* fig. 2.

¹¹ On their dating see Mastykova, *Amber Beads*.

¹² Skvozov, *Bol'shoe Isakovo* pl. 39, 6.

¹³ Hilberg, *Masurische Bügelfibeln* fig. 10, 11.

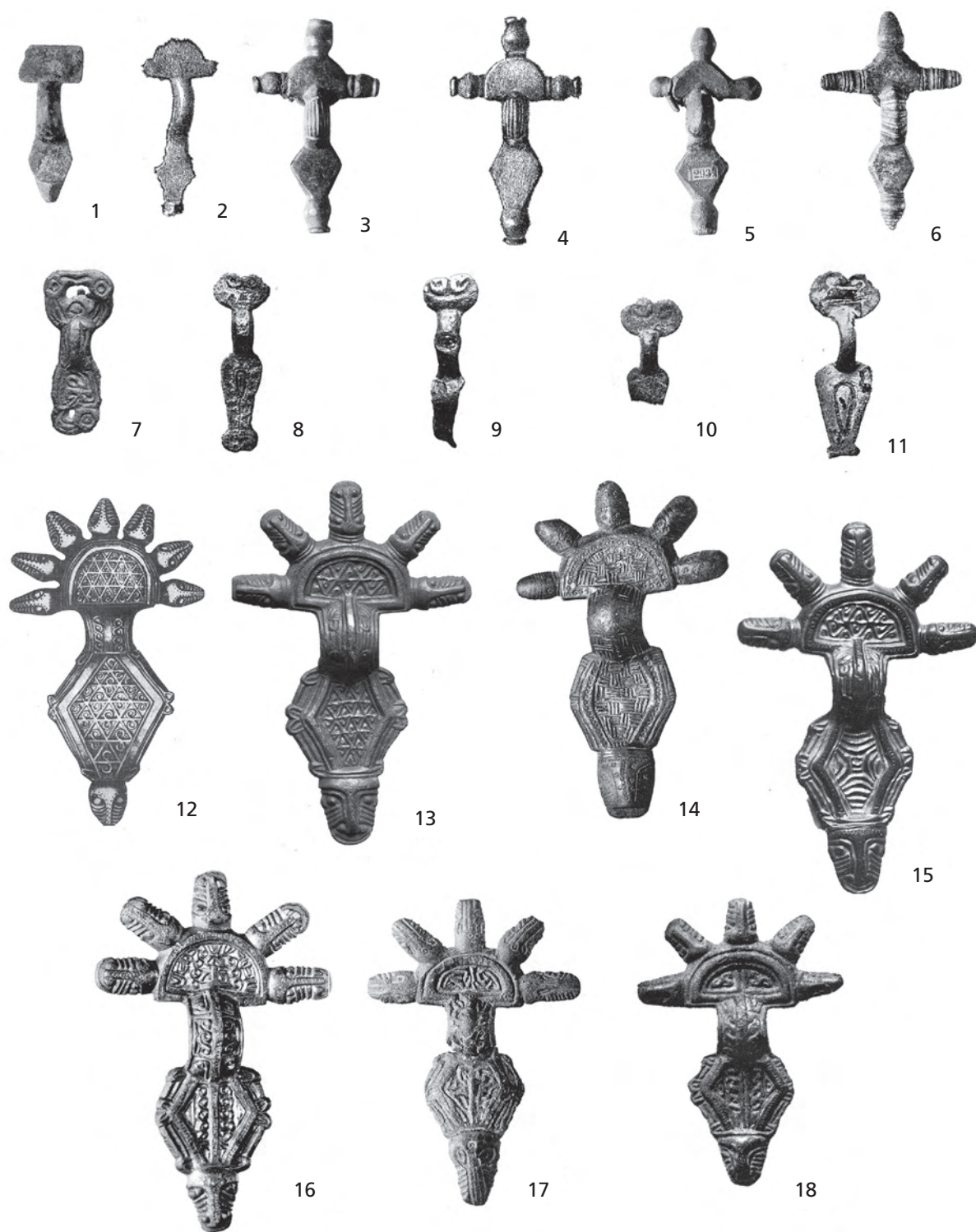


Fig. 1 Some *fibulae* from the southeastern Baltic area and their Western parallels: **1-5** Dollkeim/Kovrovo. – **6** Schlakalken/Zaos-trovie. – **7** Kellaren/Kielary, grave 16. – **8-11** Domburg. – **12** Dour. – **13** Daumen/Tumiany, grave 34. – **14** Daumen/Tumiany. – **15** Friedrikenhain/Jagielki. – **16** Kossewen/Kosewo, grave 366. – **17** East Prussia. – **18** Schönwarling/Skwarcz. – (1-5 after Hilberg, *Masurische Bügelfibeln* pl. 13, 94-95. 97. 99. 108a; 6 after Hilberg, *Masurische Bügelfibeln* pl. 34, 300; 7 after Hilberg, *Masurische Bügelfibeln* pl. 18, 139; 8-11 after Koch, *Bügelfibeln* pl. 57, 1-4; 12 after Koch, *Bügelfibeln* pl. 38, 1; 13 after Hilberg, *Masurische Bügelfibeln* pl. 6, 45; 14 after Hilberg, *Masurische Bügelfibeln* pl. 10, 75; 15 after Hilberg, *Masurische Bügelfibeln* pl. 15, 115; 16 after Hilberg, *Masurische Bügelfibeln* pl. 1, 7; 17 after Hilberg, *Masurische Bügelfibeln* pl. 28, 241; 18 after Hilberg, *Masurische Bügelfibeln* pl. 34, 301). – Without scale.

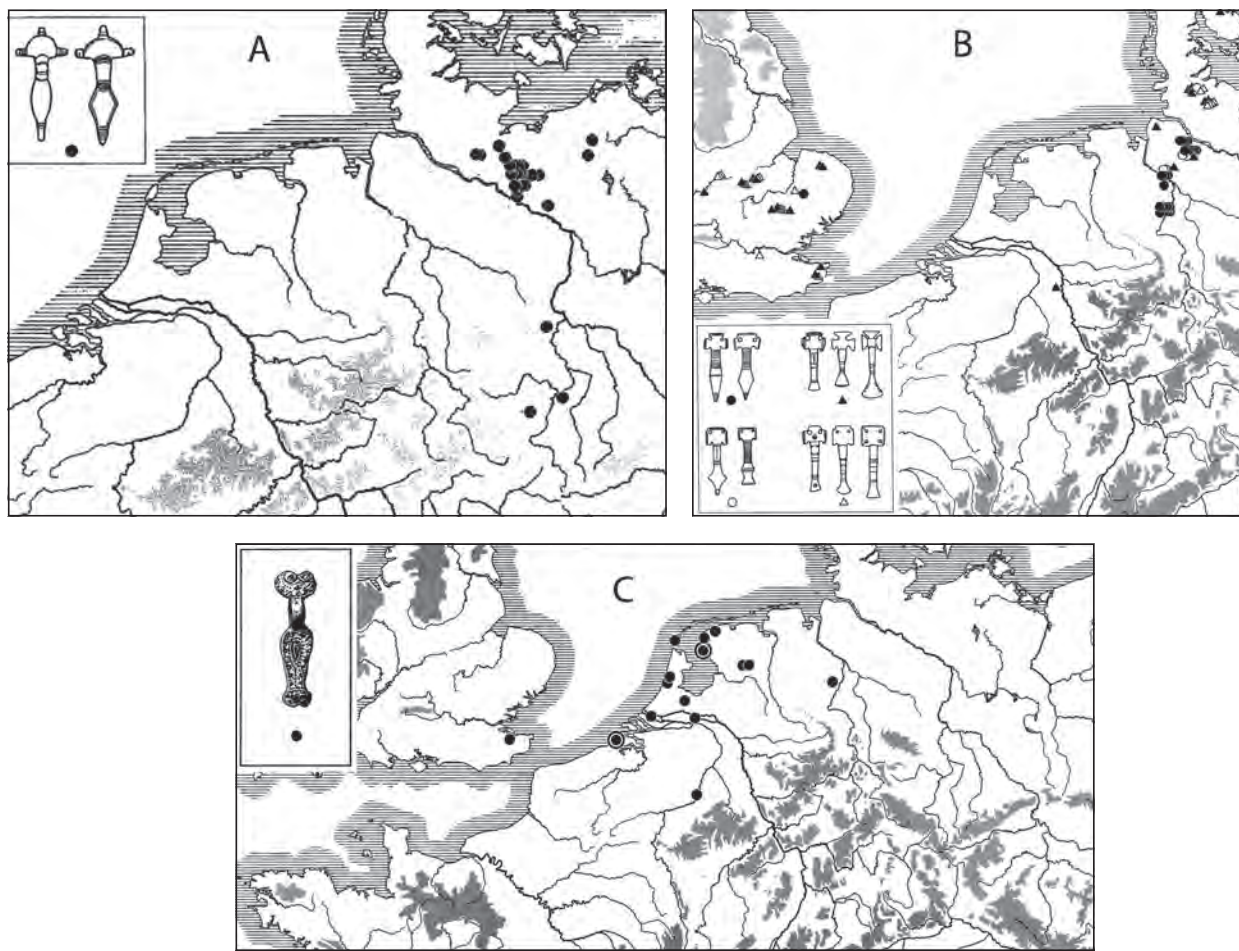


Fig. 2 The spread of some types of *fibulae* represented in the southeastern Baltic area: **A** the Breitenfurt-Pritzier-Perdhöl type. – **B** the Monsheim-Liebenau-West Stow type. – **C** the Domburg type. – (A after Böhme, Ende der Römerherrschaft fig. 73; B after Böhme, Ende der Römerherrschaft fig. 72; C after Koch, Bügelfibeln map 29).

3. A *fibula* of the Baltic-Mazurian type – Koch III.5.5. A. Koch, following J. Werner, attributed these digital *fibulae* with a lozenge-shaped pin as Baltic originating from Mazuria¹⁴. In Western Europe, a single stray find exists in Belgium, i. e. a silver gilt *fibula* 13.1 cm long from Dour (prov. Hainaut/B)¹⁵ (fig. 1, 12). Such *fibulae*, however, are well known in the southern Baltic area on sites of the Olsztyn group of the West Baltic culture and in Eastern Pomerania¹⁶. A white-metal *fibula* 10.2 cm long from Daumen/Tumiany, burial 34 (woj. warmińsko-mazurskie/PL)¹⁷ (fig. 1, 13) is the closest parallel. This burial is dated to the period E2 of Baltic chronology, i. e. from 520 to 610/625. Another *fibula* from Daumen/Tumiany¹⁸ (fig. 1, 14) seems to be a derivate of this type. Fasteners from Friedrikenhain/Jagielki (woj. warmińsko-mazurskie/PL)¹⁹, Kossewen/Kosewo, burial 366 (woj. warmińsko-mazurskie/PL)²⁰, »East Prussia«²¹ and Schönwarling/Skwarcz (woj. pomorskie/PL)²² (fig. 1, 15-18) are similar in general morphology, yet the shape of the pin and headplate and the presence of zoomorphous protrusions show a different decoration. The mapping of the spread of such *fibulae* is indicative for the Baltic origin of the Belgian *fibula*.

14 Werner, Hennegau 58; Koch, Bügelfibeln 253-254.

15 Koch, Bügelfibeln pl. 38, 1.

16 Mączyńska, Pommern 155f. fig. 2, 7-9.

17 Jakobson, Daumen und Kellaren 42 pl. 21, a; Hilberg, Masurische Bügelfibeln 374 pl. 6, 45.

18 Hilberg, Masurische Bügelfibeln pl. 10, 75.

19 Hilberg, Masurische Bügelfibeln pl. 15, 115.

20 Hilberg, Masurische Bügelfibeln 352 pl. 1, 7.

21 Hilberg, Masurische Bügelfibeln pls 28, 241; 30, 261.

22 Hilberg, Masurische Bügelfibeln pl. 34, 301.

4. *Fibulae* of the Domburg-Koch IX type are spread along the shores of the North Sea, mainly in the Netherlands²³ (fig. 2C); therefore this type is regarded as typically Dutch-Frisian. They date approximately from 520/530 to 610/630²⁴. Their prototypes should be looked for in the Turingian milieu of Middle Germany and Bohemia²⁵.

Fibulae showing two stylized bird heads originating from stray finds at Domburg (prov. Zeeland/NL)²⁶ (fig. 1, 8-11) are of particular interest. There are also degraded, probably later forms²⁷. A bronze *fibula* 4.1 cm long (fig. 1, 7) from the Kielary/Kellaren cemetery (woj. warmińsko-mazurskie/PL), burial 16 of the Olsztyn group²⁸ seems to be very close to those from Domburg. The relevant burial is dated to stage E3 of Western Baltic chronology, i.e. from 610/625 to 650/675. Given the parallels from the Netherlands, this *fibula* could only have been brought to the Balts of Prussia by sea.

These elements are spread in the context of the formation of the trans-European sea route along the south coast of the North and Baltic Seas. It will be recalled that the epoch of warfare in the southern Baltic area during the 4th-5th centuries involved Jutland, the Danish islands, Bornholm, Eland and Scania, and lasted until approximately 500. It can be deviated from finds of sacrificial sites of warlike outlook²⁹. The warfare only abates in the early 6th century with the emergence of a new economic and military-political situation³⁰. Since the 5th century, economic links in the Baltic area had been focused on Bornholm, Scania, Eland, Gotland and Uppland³¹. The situation had changed by the mid-6th century. This might be due to the spread of the pan-European plague epidemic of the Justinian epoch, to the Scandinavian islands³². In general, the mid-6th century saw certain important changes reflected in the deposition of hoards of gold objects in the Baltic basin. This period is characterized not only by the plague but also by hard winters, regular solar eclipses, lean years and famine, resulting in high rates of mortality among the population of Northern Europe. These disastrous events might have led to deposits of many sacrificial hoards³³. It was at that time that continental links became more important for the southern Baltic area and the population of the Olsztyn group of the West Baltic culture moved to the forefront in external relations³⁴. Links between the Baltic coastal population of the southern Baltic area and the Merovingian world, however, are recorded in the 7th century as well³⁵.

J. Werner suggested that sea contacts of the Old Prussian population with other areas of the Baltic-North Sea basin were carried out via the territory of present-day Denmark and the Baltic islands³⁶. The role of trade in these contacts cannot be disregarded, yet some Scandinavian archaeologists think that it should not be overestimated. According to them, political alliances of the elite of different tribes as well as purely military matters, such as looting raids, were equally important. It is believed that amber in the South and furs in the East were the main attractions for the Scandinavians³⁷. This assumption is to some extent justified. Imports in the Baltic area during the Migration Period are indeed reduced almost entirely to such luxury items as glassware, ornaments and gold coins³⁸, which is indicative of the limited role of trade. Yet, be it as it may, the Baltic area and Scandinavia in the 5th-6th centuries were fairly closely linked to the pan-European network of communications and to the northern European sea route in particular³⁹. This route either passed

23 Koch, Bügelfibeln 450-454 Fundliste 29 map 29.

24 Koch, Bügelfibeln 452 f. Typentafel 4.

25 Koch, Bügelfibeln 453.

26 Koch, Bügelfibeln nos 650-653 pl. 57, 1-4.

27 Koch, Bügelfibeln pl. 57, 5-8.

28 Jakobson, Daumen und Kellaren 72 pl. 122, a; Hilberg, Masurische Bügelfibeln pl. 18, 139.

29 Näsman, Danes 5-6; Kazanski, Mehovaia trgovlia 33-35.

30 Näsman, Justinianic Era 261 fig. 1.

31 Lund Hansen, Handelszentren 161 f. fig. 2; Kazanski, Mehovaia trgovlia 35-37.

32 Seger, Zaselnie 107; Axboe, Amulet Pendants 130.

33 Stenberger, Vorgeschichte 355-356; Axboe, Amulet Pendants 129-131; Kazanski, Mehovaia trgovlia 37.

34 Kazanski/Mastykova, O morskikh kontaktah 109.

35 See, for example, Kontny/Pietrzak, Merovingian Belt.

36 Werner, Hennegau 61.

37 Näsman, Etnos 21.

38 Lundström, Handel 272 f.

39 Vierck, Verlaufsweg 59-63; Vierck, Imitatio imperii 65 fig. 1; Neumayer/Nüsse, Land des Bernsteins fig. 21.

through the Baltic and North Seas⁴⁰ or via the Danish straits, or through Jutland, or else via a staging post in the southern part of Jutland⁴¹.

The spread of female accessories in traditional societies, with a few exceptions, such as beads, cannot reflect trading links, since women's costume had a special sacral status and moved only with its wearers. That is why the specialists in Baltic antiquities assume that the spread of women's attire beyond their core area is indicative first and foremost of marital relationships⁴². Marriages usually secured military and political links between different barbarian peoples. It must be remembered, though, that the majority of the above-mentioned objects were local replicas of allochthonous ornaments. It seems likely that these ornaments, brought by their wearers into a foreign milieu, became imitated and included in the local attire.

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⁴⁰ Vierck, Verlaufsweg fig. 52.

⁴¹ Kazanski/Mastykova, Contacts; Kazanski/Mastykova, O morskikh kontaktah 108f.

⁴² Bitner-Wróblewska, East-West Connections 124f.

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SUMMARY

Some Types of *fibulae* in the Southwestern Baltic Area and their Western Parallels

Fibulae of Western/Merovingian and Saxon origin have long been identified in East Prussia among the Western Baltic civilizations (Olsztyn, Elblong and Dollkeim-Kovrovo groups). Some finds of women's brooches may be indicative of sea contacts via the North and Baltic Seas (types Monsheim-Liebenau-West Stow, Breitenfurt, Baltic-Mazurian – Koch III.5.5, Domburg – Koch IX). These elements are spread in the context of the formation of the trans-European sea route along the south coast of the North and Baltic Seas in the 5th-6th centuries. This route passed either through the Baltic and North Seas, or via the Danish straits, or through Jutland, or else via a staging post in the southern part of Jutland. The spread of women's attire beyond their core area is indicative first and foremost of marital relationships that secured military and political links between different barbarian peoples.

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