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The back page: Suspension loop for gold bracteate S12625, from Hå on Jæren, Rogaland. Photo: Annette G. Øvrelid.

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The rosette fibulas and the social strategies of the Late Roman Iron Age

TORBEN TRIER CHRISTIANSEN

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During 2018–2022, the North Jutland Museums excavated large parts of one of three burial grounds near the farm Grønhøjgård southeast of Aalborg, Northern Jutland, Denmark. The graves, their contents, and the site's general character stand out from the region's rich record of contemporary burial grounds, and the rich and varied find material from the site forms the picture of a sacral place that has no exact parallels from Iron-age Denmark. Among the finds from the burial ground are ten rosette fibulas, which, while found in good numbers in many other regions across Denmark, are represented elsewhere only by one to four specimens at their respective locations. This paper presents the fibulas from the Grønhøjgård burial ground and discusses their social significance. It is argued that rosette fibulas may be viewed as a tool of communication that conveyed symbolic meaning on several levels and thus served multiple purposes in a Late-Roman social landscape where the roles of some highborn women were changing markedly.

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Key words: Rosette fibula, Late Roman Iron Age, social strategies, gender archaeology

Introduction

The eye-catching, almost grotesque-looking rosette fibulas naturally have attracted the interest of many researchers over the years and were studied closely by several of them – not least in Denmark, from where more than 90 examples originate (Ethelberg 2000; Lund Hansen 1995; Przybyła 2018; Skjødt 2009). They are not found exclusively, as might be expected, in direct connection to elite environments, but typically they have been recovered individually from scattered rich female graves. In the graves, they usually are located in the chest and shoulder areas, often closely associated with large and complex necklaces, which in several cases seem to have been held in place by the large fibulas rather than having been worn around the neck (Ethelberg 2000, 61; Nielsen 2002, 196). Apart from a few slightly later atypical specimens from Southern Jutland, the Danish rosette fibulas have been used exclusively during one or two generations in the Late Roman phases C1b–C2 (Lund Hansen 1995, 212–13; Skjødt 2009, 153). Without any obvious predecessors, the rosette fibula constitutes a significant new signal in a Scandinavian society undergoing radical changes during the Late Roman Iron Age.

During 2018–2022, archaeologists from the North Jutland Museums excavated major parts of one of three burial grounds near the farm Grønhøjgård on the outskirts of the village of Vaarst in Northern Jutland. The graves, their contents, and the site's general character stand out from the rich record of contemporary burial grounds of the region. The investigation included approximately 105 inhumation graves dated to 200–550 AD and four cremation graves, one of which originates from the last century BC; the other three are undated. Despite evidence of secondary reopening of almost 75% of the graves, several contained remains of lavish furnishings. The burial ground is situated on a small ridge, and in its northernmost part, the largest and best-equipped graves had been placed around a three-aisled building. Cultural layers characterised by large numbers of animal bones and fire-cracked stones found nearby indicate intense ritual feasting in the area, and the special character of the site is underlined further by the recovery of a series of small gold and silver objects deposited in and around the burial ground. In total, the rich and varied find material forms a picture of a sacral site that has no exact parallels from Iron-age Denmark (Christiansen 2021, 2024).

Among the finds from the Grønhøjgård burial ground are four more or less intact rosette fibulas from graves or modern ditches running through graves as well as fragments of at least six more from the plough soil covering the burial ground, presumably originating from ploughed-out graves. Both in terms of numbers and the range of variation of the fibulas, this find material is without parallels. Naturally, it raises intriguing questions regarding the function of the special fibulas and the burial ground. The former is the focus of this paper. An initial presentation of the fibulas from the burial ground and of the regional setting is intended to form a basis for the discussion of the communicative significance of the rosette fibulas and their role in the social strategies of the Late-Roman Scandinavian aristocracy.

The rosette fibulas from the Grønhøjgård burial ground

The rosette fibulas, none of which are completely identical, were included by both Oscar Almgren and Mogens Mackeprang in their early typologies (Almgren 1923; Mackeprang 1943). However, many new finds have paved the way for a more detailed classification of this growing and rather heterogeneous group of fibulas. In recent times, Per Ethelberg and Ulla Lund Hansen have discussed them in connection with their studies of the Skovgårde and Himlingøje burial grounds, respectively (Ethelberg 2000, 51–53; Lund Hansen 1995, 212–13). Ethelberg's work includes a simple division of rosette fibulas into the two main groups of small and large examples and a subdivision of the latter into three variants (Ethelberg 2000, 51–52). A more detailed study of the Danish rosette fibulas and their complex constructions was made by Annagrete Skjødt a few years later. Her visual inspection of the large corpus of Danish fibulas allowed the definition of six basic forms based on various construction elements and techniques (Skjødt 2009). The latest typology has been presented by Marzena Przybyła, who mapped and typologised the rosette fibulas from their entire distribution area – from Norway in the north to the Black Sea in the south. Her classification, which (not surprisingly) shares many details with Skjødt's regional Danish study, includes eight main groups (Przybyła Groups 1–8), most of which are split further into variants according to minor technical or stylistic details (Przybyła 2018, 30–126). Przybyła's typology is the basis for the following.

Because of the extreme fragmentation of the examples from the plough layer at Grønhøjgård, minimum counts of the number of rosette fibulas from this context rely solely on identified bows. The degree of fragmentation also limits further typological determination in several cases, not least because Przybyła's system of classification, designed to cope with the individual character of the rosette fibulas, frequently is based on the sum of several defining criteria rather than individual ones (Przybyła 2018, 30–126).

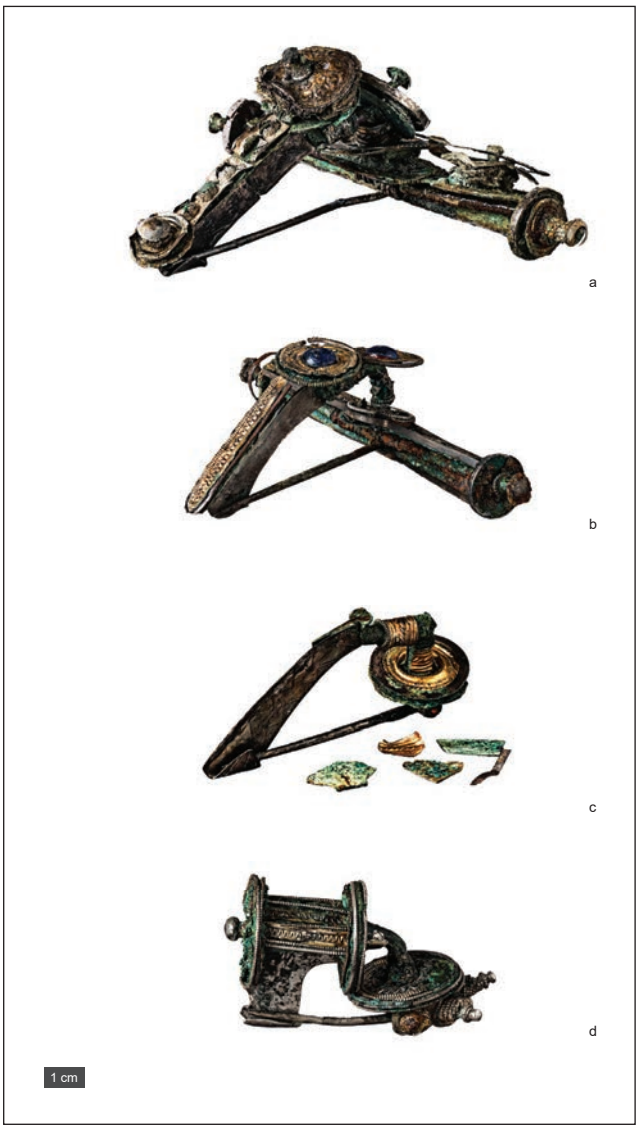

Figure 1. Rosette fibulas found in contexts below ploughing depth at the Grønhøjgård burial ground. a) 7032X2740 – Przybyła 1b; b) 7032X0702 – Przybyła 1a; c) 7032X2114 – Przybyła 1a; d) 7032X0420 – Przybyła 2. Photos: North Jutland Museum.

Three of the four intact or, to some degree, still articulated rosette fibulas from the Grønhøjgård burial ground belong to Przybyła's Group 1 – two (Figures 1b and 1c) to her variant A and one to the Group 1/Variant B category (Figure 1a). At least four of the six fragmented specimens also belong to this group, in which bows made of bronze characterise the fibulas. A fifth may have been of this type as well (Figure 2c). The absence of a hole for

Figure 2. A selection of the fragments of rosette fibulas from modern ditches and the plough soil at the Grønhøjgård burial ground. a) 7032X0043a; b) 7032X2394; c) DIME 59151 d) 7032X0044; e) DIME 59267; f) DIME 59246; g) DIME 59238; h) 7032X0043b; i) 7032X2101; j) DIME 59255; k) 7032X2064; l) 7032X2388; m) DIME 59269; n) 7032X2010; o) 7032X2068; p) 7032X2112. Photos: North Jutland Museums.

the rivet to fasten the rosette to the bow or a rivet cast directly on the bow's knee for this purpose suggests a relation to Group 1. However, the bow made of silver is a feature shared only with one other fibula from Group 1 (Przybyła 2018, 33). Without further details, it is impossible to determine whether this fragment represents a rare Group 1 or a Group 4 fibula. Finally, the two last examples from the Grønhøjgård burial ground are specimens of Group 2 (which comprises only six more fibulas, all found in north-western Denmark): one was discovered from a modern drainage ditch running through a grave and is almost intact (Figure 1d); the other now consists only of a few fragments recovered from the plough soil (Figures 2d–g). A broken-off rectangular bronze plate with small remains of silver foil may represent the poorly preserved remains of a cylinder for a third one of this kind. But the damage sustained during centuries in the plough soil prevents determination, and it has therefore been left out of this account.

Some of the fibulas listed above reveal technical details that are out of the ordinary. The Przybyła Group 1/Variant A fibula X2114 (Figure 1c) presents an interesting new solution on how to attach the silver catch plate to the bronze bow: instead of the usual mounting in the split foot of the bow, the bronze bow had been cast with a short plate onto which the real catch plate was then riveted – a technical process seemingly without parallels. A similar, but slightly different solution is seen in one of the fragmented Group 1 fibulas from the plough soil (Figure 2b): here, the bow presumably had been cast with a catch plate, which subsequently was covered with a sheet of silver foil decorated with geometric engravings. The silver foil was wrapped around the catch plate and fastened with a tubular bronze list along the straight edge. A similar technical detail is known from one other example, from Fibula A found in grave 4 at Nørre Knold, 20 kilometres northwest of Grønhøjgård (Przybyła 2018, figs. 3/4–4, 3/12–9).

The efforts to replace the bronze catch plate or make it appear silver are part of the general pattern characteristic of fibulas of Przybyła's Groups 1 and 2. Typically, the visual parts of the bronze constructions were almost completely covered with decorated sheets of silver foil, most often gilded to increase the impressiveness.

Ornamental details

Even though it is impossible to piece together the fragments from the plough soil, the overall impression is that the rosette fibulas from Grønhøjgård in most respects seem to have been decorated following the general trends in the production of their counterparts in Scandinavia.

Figure 3. Gilded silver foil with anthropomorphic and zoomorphic images from the Grønhøjgård burial ground – presumably covers for pin catches and spring constructions of large rosette fibulas. a) 7032X2068, b) 7032X2112, and c) 7032X0080 & DIME 59156. Photos: North Jutland Museums.

Decorations predominantly were made with pressure techniques in thin silver foil, which often was gilded. Occasionally, the visual effect of the rosettes was enhanced with a circular mounting of glass in the centre, usually blue glass. Furthermore, most fibulas feature engraved lines and/or geometric patterns or a series of punch marks on the catch plate; on some, the engravings even form short runic inscriptions (Imer 2015, cat. nos. Sj 73, NJy 48, SJy 46, SJ 79, Sj 80).

The space restrictions of this paper do not allow a full account of all the ornamental details of the rosette fibulas from Grønhøjgård. Yet, three pieces of decorated silver foil found in the plough soil and in a modern ditch deserve to be mentioned as their motifs never have been

observed on rosette fibulas before, and some have no exact parallels in other contemporary objects.

The first of the pieces (7032X2068) is a small fragment of an approximately 12mm wide band of silver foil (Figure 3a). It is gilded like the rest of the three pieces in focus here, and the surviving end of the band is smoothly rounded. A single string of imitated beads marks its edge, and in the centre is the image of a bird in profile facing left, away from the rounded end. In front of it, at the break, is the tail of a second, apparently identical bird: the complete band probably featured a row of birds. The animal is depicted with two thin and feet-less legs, a long beak on a tiny head, and a short neck on a massive chest that narrows markedly towards the triangular fish-like tail; the body is covered by crosshatching, the tail with lines radiating from the base.

The only other Danish rosette fibula with zoomorphic figures is one from Falkensten on Zealand (Przybyła 2018, fig. 3/39–7). The cover of its spring construction is decorated with a similar string of birds. The animals of the two pieces are not identical, but share the same fundamental outline, and there can be little doubt that they aim to depict birds of the same species, possibly, according to Skjødt, woodcocks (Skjødt 2009, 165). Several other contemporary objects are decorated with birds with the same short neck, massive body, and wide tail (Przybyła 2018, 546–50). Przybyła pointed out that the birds on the fibulas from Jutland are all facing left, whereas the birds from eastern Denmark are looking in the opposite direction. This regional difference is further underlined by minor variations of details – the western birds, including those from Grønhøjgård, have smaller heads and longer beaks, for example (Przybyła 2018, 547–48).

Although it is not often that rounded ends like the one of 7032X2068 are found on the covers of the spring construction (see, however, Przybyła 2018, fig. 3/39–9), it appears plausible to assume that this fragment stems from such a cover. The resemblance to the fibula from Falkensten and the vertical orientation of the string of birds support this assumption.

The second of these pieces is an intact, 9mm wide band of gilded silver with one straight end and one neatly rounded (Figure 3b – 7032X2112). The 55mm long band is decorated along the edge with a line of imitated beads and with a row of human faces, shown *en-face*, with distinct demarcations of the heads' round tops, which are hatched. At one end, the final face is a smaller, triangular head with rounded ears – probably the image of a bear or a wolf. The band was recovered in a modern ditch and probably originally was mounted on rosette fibula 7032X2114, as this was found close by. The ditch must have been dug through a rich female grave. Since a similar, but poorly preserved string of faces is seen on the cover for the catch plate of the intact rosette fibula 7032X2740, it seems likely that 7032X2112 had a similar function. The rounded end of the band suggests, however, that this fibula, unlike 7032X2740, did not include a cover that ended in a roundel. None of the five little faces on 7032X2740 are intact, but they appear almost identical to the ones on the well-preserved piece 7032X2112.

Anthropomorphic images on objects associated with the female sphere are known from some areas on the Baltic Sea, but in western Denmark, the pieces from Grønhøjgård are without parallels (Przybyła 2018, 542). Similar mask-like faces, however, are found on a few Jutish objects from male graves dated to the last phase of the Early Roman Iron Age (B2) and the beginning of the Late Roman Period (Rasmussen 1995, 64–68). Some of the shields among the slightly younger depositions in the war booty sacrifice at Illerup Ådal have been ornamented with similar masks with even finer details, for example. Here, they appear on rivet heads that were facing the enemy (v. Carnap-Bornheim and Ilkjær 1996, tables 63, 121, 135, 145). Slightly different masks are found on the Dejbjerg wagon and on a small selection of predominantly male equipment from Funen, Zealand, and Northern Germany (Rasmussen 1995, 67–69).

The small head of a predatory animal at the end of the row of human faces on 7032X2112 is without obvious relatives in the catalogue of animals on Scandinavian metal works of the Late Roman Iron Age. Still, in Roman mythology, the wolf was an important character, and the different depictions on gold bracteates and other Scandinavian gold objects testify to the significance of both the wolf and the bear in the north in the centuries following the Late Roman Period (Hedeager 1997; Wamers 2009). The terms "wolf" and "bear" also are among the rather few words that have come down to us written in runes of the *Old Futhark* (Imer 2018, 35). The widespread use of bearskins in warrior graves, a tradition followed in at least one of the graves in the Grønhøjgård burial ground, too, further highlights the special role accorded to the bear in Southern Scandinavia, especially in the centuries following the Late Roman Iron Age (Møhl 1977; Nielsen 2005, 37; Wamers 2009). In this context, the image of a predator on a fibula worn (in all probability) by a woman, leaves a strange sense of ambiguity since the wolf and the bear usually are associated with physical strength, endurance, chaos, and prowess in battle – virtues predominantly connected to the male universe. The image's position and size underline the peculiarity even more: the small head was placed so close to the end of the cover

that it must have been covered – at least partly, if not completely – by the rosette on the tip of the fibula's foot – perhaps carrying a message exclusively for the owner of the fibula. In this light, some of the other virtues of the wolf and the bear, such as their cunning, protective, and caring nature, may have been central to the meaning of this particular image.

The third piece is a fragmented, 10mm wide band that originally must have been approximately 60mm long (Figure 3c – 7032X0080 and DIME 59156). It is represented by two pieces recovered from the plough soil. Its ornamentation consists of a horizontal row of women shown in forward-facing position, their hands raised above the shoulders and the legs spread wide with bent knees. They appear naked as the contours of their oversized bosoms and their vaginas are visible. Apart from this, the images are rather crude – details of the women's faces and hair clearly have not been prioritised by the artisan.

The dimensions of the band and the horizontal row of images suggest that this piece also served as a cover for the catch plate of a rosette fibula – probably one ending in a roundel, as otherwise, a bit of the rounded end probably would have been visible on the fragment. Furthermore, the absence of a framing along the edge indicates that the band was held in position by a list – a frequent detail on Danish rosette fibulas (cf. e.g. Przybyła 2018, fig. 3/18).

In a wider chronological perspective, the motif of the bulging female figure, signalling fertility, clearly relates to a concept with historical roots as deep as the Palaeolithic, but the image has no parallels in the silver foil objects of the Late Roman Iron Age (Angeli 1989; National Geographic 2022). Looking at the general character of the figures, the style of a rather crude outline with few details perhaps most closely resembles the man with the sword and the animals on the beaker from Himlingøje (Lund Hansen 1995, pl. 2).

The use of new figures and motifs on rosette fibulas otherwise predominantly connected with the male sphere is interesting, and the presence of three uniquely decorated fibulas at one site is striking.

Production and distribution of rosette fibulas

With the ten newly recovered fibulas from the Grønhøjgård burial ground and three more newcomers from the surrounding region, 93 rosette fibulas are now known from across Denmark. When these are added to Przybyła's 2018 catalogue, the general trends demonstrated by her study are underlined even further (Figure 4): the rosette fibulas of Groups 1 and 2 markedly are concentrated in western Denmark, while the Zealand counterparts of Groups 3 and 4 are found in this region only sporadically.

The striking regionality of distribution, the concentrations in a few regions, and the complexity of the fibulas' construction – and therefore the high levels of skills and materials required to produce them – suggest the existence of a few thriving workshops, most likely centred around elite environments in different parts of the country (Przybyła 2018, 143; Skjødt 2009, 171); the most distinct of which is the region south of the eastern part of the Limfjord in northern Jutland.

Ulla Lund Hansen noted that the rosette fibula from Himlingøje 1949 Grave 2 and one from the Skovgårde burial ground are so similar that they must have come out of the same Zealand workshop (Lund Hansen 1995, 213). This may well be the case. Despite many shared details, every rosette fibula seems to be a unique product – probably designed individually and made directly to the recipient's order (Przybyła 2018, 143), but while the similarities of the fibulas' fundamental construction within each group and of the majority of the decorative silver foils suggest a certain degree of "mass production", the final fabrication of the fibulas possibly was an assembly of a range of modules picked by the client from a broad selection of pre-manufactured parts. Occasionally, the more discerning customers would have demanded something "out of the ordinary": at Grønhøjgård, the different exclusive covers of silver foil decorated with anthropomorphic and zoomorphic figures may represent such products made to accommodate the requests of a particularly picky group of clients.

The ten rosette fibulas found at Grønhøjgård break radically with the more scattered pattern characteristic of the distribution of rosette fibulas elsewhere, where one to two of them are the norm at a single burial ground, with a maximum of up to four in only a few cases (Ethelberg 2000; Przybyła 2018, cat. nos. 350–53). The pronounced concentration of fibulas at Grønhøjgård and the wide range of technical and stylistic solutions applied to their designs indicate the presence of a thriving fine-metal work environment in the area. It seems likely that the skilled artisans at this centre also were the producers of most of the region's other Group 1 fibulas. Two examples from the area south of the eastern end of the Limfjord do not fit this pattern, however (Figure 5). These presumably have come from Zealand workshops. A few other Zealand types of rosette fibulas have been found scattered around Scandinavia outside their main distribution area, as well, with one even as far north as Nord-Trøndelag, Norway (Przybyła 2018, fig. 3/55). As discussed in the

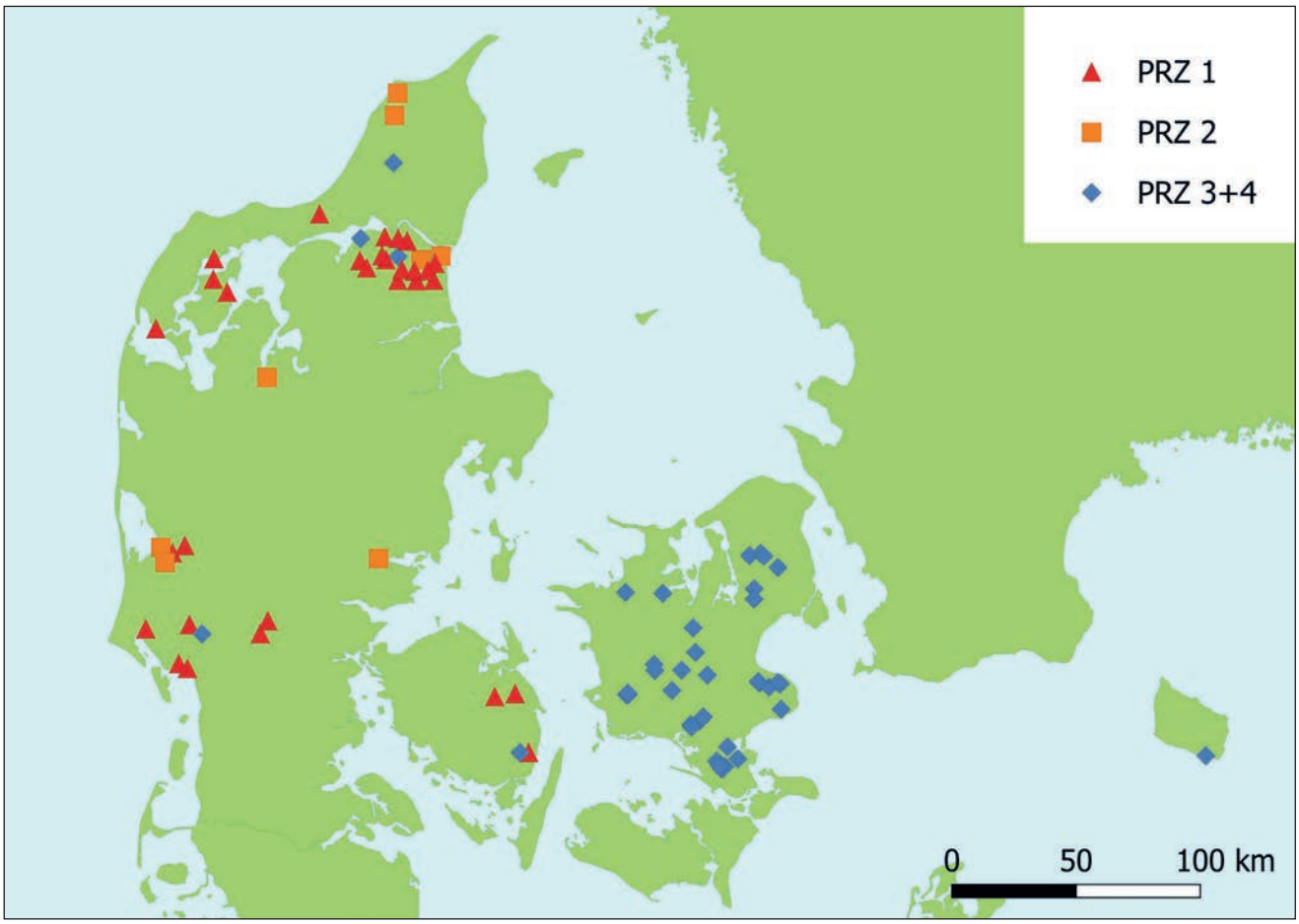

Figure 4. The distribution of the common types of rosette fibulas in Denmark – Przybyła's (Prz) Groups 1–4. Source: Przybyła 2018, with additions.

following, the transfer of the fibulas found far from their origins may well be rooted in exogamy, but in order to understand the role of the rosette fibulas, an investigation of the vast majority that ended up close to where they were produced may prove more promising.

Society and social landscape in 3rd-century Northern Jutland

When looking at the war booty offerings and the Roman imports and other luxurious equipment in the high-status graves of the Late Roman Iron Age, it is sometimes easy to forget that society was agricultural. The presence of war – signalled by war booty offerings and the defence structures, for example – must have shaken the very foundation of the agricultural communities and challenged their stability, which is a cornerstone of farming, where the care for fields and household provisions is a long-term investment. On this background, it is no surprise that there are clear indications of considerable change in rural settlement in Denmark during the Late Roman Iron Age (Hansen 2015; Hedeager 1992; Hvass 1988, 70–75), including the area of the eastern Limfjord. During most of the Early Iron Age, the region was densely populated by people living in hamlets typically comprising about 10 small farms or only few more. They usually were placed no more than 750 to 1500 meters apart on the hills in the undulating landscape. From the late 2nd to the early 3rd centuries, this existing, stable settlement organisation changed significantly, when the old settlements with deep roots, in many cases stretching back to the Late Bronze Age, were abandoned or restructured radically. The farms grew, but the number of units dropped, and the new farms typically were constructed in areas some distance away from the original locations of the Early Iron-age hamlets (Christiansen 2018; Haue 2012, 307–10; Nielsen 2023). The growing find material from the period also indicates the existence of magnate farms, the most spectacular of which was excavated in 2022 at Flødalsminde, only a few hundred meters distance from one of the region's graves containing a rosette-fibula. Here, the remains of a 60-meter-long longhouse from the 3rd century were excavated. This is approximately three times the size of the ordinary

longhouses in this part of the country in the Late Roman Period, and the building is interpreted as the residence of a local magnate (Nielsen 2024). It seems plausible to link the restructuration of settlement and the appearance of oversized magnates' farms to fundamental socio-political organisational changes, probably followed by the reformation of the taxation system (cf. e.g. Hansen 2015; Haue 2012; Hedeager 1992).

The social significance of the rosette fibulas

There can be no doubt that the many societal changes of the Late Roman Iron Age were paralleled by radical changes in ideology. Mads Holst has presented the development as a competition of multiple ideologies and emphasised the significance of the friction between the ideals of the warrior aristocracy and the values of the village community (Holst 2014). This contest must have been an ongoing process of negotiation throughout the Late Roman and Early Germanic Iron Ages. Some small insight into this was provided by recent studies of the development of female dress across Scandinavia, as they suggest that the growth of a new warrior elite and supra-regional military institutions spurred local initiatives to mark more stable ethnic affiliations in the 5th and 6th centuries (Røstad 2021, 313). The rosette fibulas may represent outcomes of earlier stages of these processes of negotiation.

The complexity of the rosette fibulas and their almost vulgar visual expression of wealth indicate that they were born out of a distinct communicative need. From this perspective, it is probably also fair to assume that the fibulas did not bear just one meaning, such as symbolic significance indicated in the fine ornamentations and detailed constructions of zoomorphic and anthropomorphic figures, which must have held special meanings. Though their symbolic language may stay hidden from us, we can, however, trust that the fibulas were not understood in the same way by all spectators. The deviation of the opulent rosette fibulas – which signalled socioeconomic status way above the average – from common-type dress accessories would have been obvious to even a child. In contrast, the subtle technical and stylistic differences between rosette fibulas of Przybyła's Groups 1 and 3, cannot have been obvious to commoners, while to a small part of the upper class, they most likely were very important and significant. Thus, it was paramount for the wearer of a rosette fibula to move in the right social environments and be present at the right events in order to exploit the full communicative potential of the fibula and the fine dress it went with.

On the other hand, rosette fibulas were, no doubt, also important communication tools regularly employed in more modest settings. Many of them ended up in graves associated with settlements dispersed in the agricultural landscape, where they served as eye-catching elements in burial rituals that probably were witnessed by larger groups of local farmers. It is worth noting that rosette fibulas usually were distributed within the areas of their manufacture, so their communicative effect in local communities may well have been central to their function. This does not necessarily contradict the widely cherished hypothesis that rosette fibulas – along with other types of high-status dress accessories and perhaps the women wearing them themselves – were used strategically when alliances were forged with other families from the upper levels of society, both locally and supra-regionally (Przybyła 2018, 586; Skjødt 2009, 171; Storgaard 2003, 114; Straume 1988). Exogamy as well as gift-giving appear to be likely causes for the circulation of some fibulas away from their place of origin. The peculiar distribution of the few non-local rosette fibulas in the various regions of Denmark is worth noting: the Zealand types occur scattered here and there outside of Zealand, whereas none of the Jutish types have been recovered on the island of Zealand so far. This seems to suggest the exercise of aristocratic control that was greater in Zealand than in the neighbouring regions.

Interestingly, the two graves with "foreign" rosette fibulas found in the eastern Limfjord area are less richly equipped than the ones with local types: although in one of them, the number of glass and amber beads is high, that of other types of objects is markedly smaller. It is tempting to interpret this as a sign of lower status and to regard the Zealand fibulas in moderately equipped graves in burial grounds on the outskirts of the centre at Grønhøjgård as relicts of the strategic manoeuvres of a Zealand elite operating to create alliances with families outside the main centre of power in this part of Jutland. However, other backgrounds to the discrepancies in grave inventories cannot be excluded at present. These may also reflect, for example, differing grave rituals connected to the burial of non-local women. One such difference is the absence of spindle whorls in the two graves with Zealand rosette fibulas, which are found in all other graves containing regional rosette fibulas – commonly small, elegant bronze whorls that seem to signal a close connection between the ideals for aristocratic women and fine textile production.

Finally, the appearance of rosette fibulas around AD 200 and the sudden focus on highlighting the special role of some women, rather than men, further suggest that

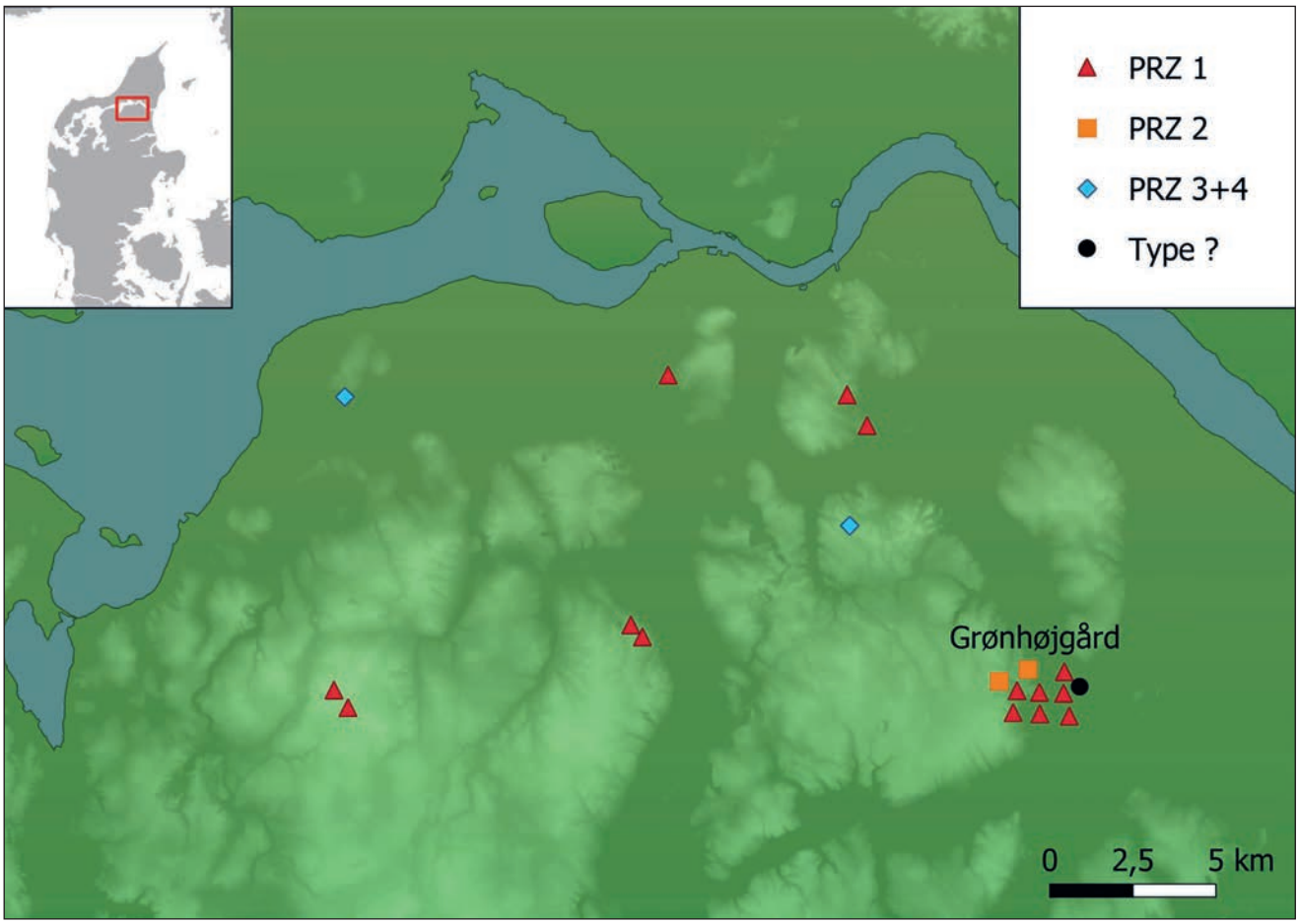

Figure 5. The distribution of the different types of rosette fibulas in the region at the eastern end of the Limfjord. Map by author.

women were now key persons in important social arenas. In this light, the rosette fibula may be viewed as an invention that perhaps served to bridge some of the gap between a new world order with a fixed ruling class forged by military power and the need for stability in the agricultural communities. In essence, it was not merely a signal of the high social status of the bearer to underline the superiority of their spouses in a competitive game with other members of the elite, but also a booster to support highborn women who administered tasks and took positions in the local village communities that previously were held and carried out exclusively by male members of the lineage. This, however, still leaves the distinct concentration of rosette fibulas at Grønhøjgård unexplained. That is a topic in need of further exploration, but considering the general character of all find material from the site, there can be little doubt that this particular burial ground must have functioned in connection with the regional centre of power. It therefore seems likely that the rosette fibula as the new symbol of power spread from there to the surrounding settlements of the region, or at least the idea and symbolic meaning of it did.

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