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The front page: Amber nuggets and semi-finished amber beads and pendants from pit-house 7/91 in Biskupice, Poland.

Photo: Marcin Woźniak.

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

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# Nithijo in Illerup and his colleague in Thorsberg: Some aspects of high class goldsmithing at the beginning of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century AD. A case study in “active or conscious reception”

CLAUS VON CARNAP-BORNHEIM

Claus von Carnap-Bornheim 2025. **Nithijo in Illerup and his colleague in Thorsberg: Some aspects of high class goldsmithing at the beginning of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century AD. A case study in “active or conscious reception”.**

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The spoils of war from Roman-period southern Scandinavia offer a wide range of possibilities for analysis and interpretation, also with regard to the production conditions of fine smiths in the 3<sup>rd</sup> century AD. One striking aspect of this is that for the first time a comprehensive serial production of spears, javelins and shield bosses, which often comprised several hundred pieces, can be proven. This new production process also found its way into silversmithing, as the elaborate shield fittings from Illerup, deposit A, show. The combination of Roman and Germanic elements in the equipment of military elites is striking and has been discussed in the literature since Conrad Engelhardt’s discoveries on Thorsberg Moor. Current research into the finds from Thorsberg Moor has revealed a wealth of fascinating individual observations. Through the concept of “conscious or active reception” as a process of appropriation and artistic transformation, these phenomena can now be conclusively summarised in a model that can explain the relevance of this process, especially for the social elites of the later Roman Period in the *barbaricum*.

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*Key words:* Scandinavian war booty sacrifices, serial production, equipment for military elites, the concept of “active or conscious reception”

## Introduction

It is certainly not surprising that the societal and political context in which gold and silversmiths produced their work in prehistory and early history has repeatedly been the subject of archaeological and historical discussions. The value and rarity of the metal, its resistance to corrosion and its connection with the respective social elites allow important insights and modelling in prehistoric and historical epochs. If we now, in the context of this article, consider the 3<sup>rd</sup> century AD in particular, the comprehensive volume on the “Goldsmith Mysteries” edited by Alexandra Pesch and Ruth Blankenfeldt from 2012 (Pesch and Blankenfeldt 2012) offers a wide-ranging insight into the available archaeological and historical

sources, whereas the contributions in this volume focus primarily on northern Europe and the first millennium AD. Even if important contributions (Armbruster 2012; Voß 2012) deal with the Roman Period in the *barbaricum*, it is noticeable that the material of the Roman-period war booty sacrifices, such as from Illerup Ådal, deposit A, and from Thorsberg Moor, was not included in the discussion. Overall, if one surveys the international literature on the Roman Period in the *barbaricum*, it appears that the finds from Illerup and Thorsberg Moor in particular are only very rarely used for the discussion of the development of fine smithing. However, the work of Marzena Przybyła is an impressive exception here, in which the Roman Iron-age stamped silver sheet foils (*Pressblech*) are

comprehensively compiled, typologised and interpreted, and the finds from Illerup and Thorsberg Moor placed in an overarching context (Przybyła 2018). Nevertheless, the impression arises that the potential for interpretation has not yet been fully utilised, as the significance of the two complexes are not, or are at best only marginally considered in the discussion of the emergence of early arts and crafts (or early art) in the Germanic *barbaricum* during the Roman Period and their relationship to corresponding phenomena in the Imperium Romanum (cf. Hardt and Heinrich-Tamáska 2013; Eilbracht et al. 2018). The aim of this article is therefore to focus on the multifaceted material from Illerup and Thorsberg Moor and to discuss the *Pressblech* decoration on shields, helmets, sword equipment and personal equipment in a comparative manner.

The Roman-period war booty offerings open up a group of material for archaeological research that differs fundamentally in its methodological interpretation potential from burial or settlement contexts, as the objects of one single sacrifice were deposited in large numbers, often comprising several thousand pieces, each at a specific point in time and can therefore be regarded as a contemporaneous assemblage. For our topic, this provides interesting scope for analysis and interpretation, as it is an extensive ensemble that represents a simultaneous artefact variation that can be used, among other things, to qualitatively differentiate between simultaneous techniques and allow the assignment of the different metals and techniques to different hierarchical and/or functional groups within a specific interacting group (here, a war band).

Modern research interprets these complexes as the results of ritual offerings of weapons and equipment, which were deposited as thank offerings to a helpful deity by a local population after the successful defence against an attack by hostile armed units (summarised by Rau and v. Carnap-Bornheim 2012). Corresponding ritual offerings on the Jutland Peninsula in the later Roman Period and early Migration Period can now be placed in the context of comparable sacrifices from the 4<sup>th</sup> century BC onwards that have been documented in western central Europe and northern Europe (Løvschal et al. 2019, 28, fig. 10). Overall, it should be noted that no Roman-period war booty sacrifice has been fully excavated and, of course, the question of whether all the material seized from the defeated enemies was even deposited at the time of the respective sacrifices, must remain unanswered. Therefore, our source material is incomplete in many respects, so corresponding interpretation models must always take these source-critical circumstances into account.

For the question of “Technologies – Knowledges – Sustainability”, the several thousand artefacts from the southern Scandinavian Roman-period war booty offerings provide an almost inexhaustible source material. This allows very different approaches and interpretations. One of the important aspects of this is that for the first time in the Germanic *barbaricum* it is possible to prove the serial production of typologically, technically and metrically almost identical objects in large numbers. The large series of spear and javelin heads of the same types from Illerup (Ilkjær 1990, 95 with, for example, more than 300 spearheads of the Vennolum type or Ilkjær 1990, 187 with 306 javelin-heads of the Simris type), but also corresponding types from the Vimose (Pauli Jensen 2008, tab. 12 with, for example, 193 examples of the Skiaker type) provide evidence of the extensive production of such weapons as early as the beginning of the late Roman Period in presumably centralised workshops, which also had consistent access to the raw materials needed and, of course, possessed the required technological knowledge (v. Carnap-Bornheim 1992, 48–50; see also Birch 2018). This also makes it clear, however, that the military milieu was a key factor in the implementation of technological innovation in the Germanic *barbaricum* as early as the Roman Period.

## The magnificent shields from Illerup Ådal, deposit A

The magnificent shields from Illerup with their silver-gilt fittings must also be regarded as products of a very early series production. On the basis of the respective finds, they can be assigned to the first deposit at Illerup site A and thus dated to the first decade of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century (Ilkjær 2001, 363–65 with tab. 34). The five magnificent shields have similar dimensions, with diameters of 98–112cm (v. Carnap-Bornheim and Ilkjær 1996, vol. 5, tab. 14); they are all equipped with silver rim fittings as well as shield bosses and shield grip fittings made of solid silver (v. Carnap-Bornheim and Ilkjær 1996, vol. 5, tab. 13). The shield bosses are covered with gilded silver *Pressblech*, in one case (SABN from the SAUE set; see v. Carnap-Bornheim and Ilkjær 1996, vol. 5, fig. 41 with further references) three oval carnelians were set on the rim of the shield boss. Remarkable are the 22 conical shield fittings, which – on bronze base constructions – each have gilded silver *Pressblech* and concentric rows of profiled silver rivets. The formal and technical uniformity of this group is further emphasised by more than 73 en-face masks, which consist of silver-gilt *Pressblech*, also mounted on base plates of bronze. They show bearded or moustached male

heads in en-face view, their eyes indicated either by dots or crosses and the head hair neatly combed backwards.

The analysis of these shield fittings can ascertain the close technical and formal connection of this group, which for the first time also attests a serial production in the field of gold and silver-smithing in the Germanic *barbaricum*. The SAUC set serves as an example: most of the components of this ostentatious shield set were discovered in the central area of the deposit in the find concentration 65/96 (v. Carnap-Bornheim and Ilkjær 1996, vol. 5, 132, figs. 101–3, vol. 6, 127–32, vol. 7, pl. 127–36; for the typology of Roman Iron-age en-face depictions, see Przybyła 2018, 528–37); a shield board fragment with the face mask ICD was found in the eastern part of the excavation and had probably already drifted there by the time of the sacrificial event. The links between this set and the SAUB shield (Figure 1), which was discovered in the eastern part of the excavation in the last year of the excavation, are particularly close (v. Carnap-Bornheim and Ilkjær 1996, vol. 5, 230–33, fig. 177, vol. 6, 222–26, figs. 92–94, vol. 7, pl. 234–45). The analysis of the 36 en-face masks and the 12 conical shield-board fittings shows that the pieces were produced from the same stamps. The only deviations are in the punchings in the pieces, for example in the edge area of the en-face masks. These two sets can be linked to three other magnificent shields by the identical dimensions of individual components (SAUD, SAUE, SAUF; see v. Carnap-Bornheim and Ilkjær

1996, vol. 5, 443 with fig. 261; here Figure 2).

These shield sets regularly include silver shield grips of Ilkjær's type 5a (Ilkjær 2001, 321), two of which bear runic inscriptions. The runic inscription **lagubewa** on the shield grip WVI of type 5a (Ilkjær 2001, 321) from find concentration 41/73 (see v. Carnap-Bornheim and Ilkjær 1996, vol. 5, 69 with fig. 41; here Figure 3, left) can be interpreted as a proper name (see [www.runesdb.de/find/175](http://www.runesdb.de/find/175); with reading and extensive literature; accessed 26 April 2024). It therefore stands to reason that this identifies the owner of the magnificent shield SAUE (v. Carnap-Bornheim and Ilkjær 1996, vol. 7, pl. 54–56). In contrast, the SAUF set from find concentration 57/90 (see v. Carnap-Bornheim and Ilkjær 1996, vol. 5, 121 with fig. 88; here Figure 3, right) bears the inscription **nipijo tawide** = “*Nipijō made*” (see [www.runesdb.de/find/183](http://www.runesdb.de/find/183) with reading and extensive literature; accessed 26 April 2024), which is unanimously regarded as a maker's inscription and which can be easily integrated into a series of comparable *Tawide*-inscriptions (Rau and Nedoma 2012/2013). The owner of the SAUE shield and the maker of the SAUF shield appear to have had a special relationship via this medium of runic inscriptions. We will discuss this again below. Whether both inscriptions originate from the same hand would have to be the subject of a detailed investigation. Andreas Rau points out that the use of the rare mirror runes **þ** and **w** in both cases could indicate this (oral communication Andreas Rau).

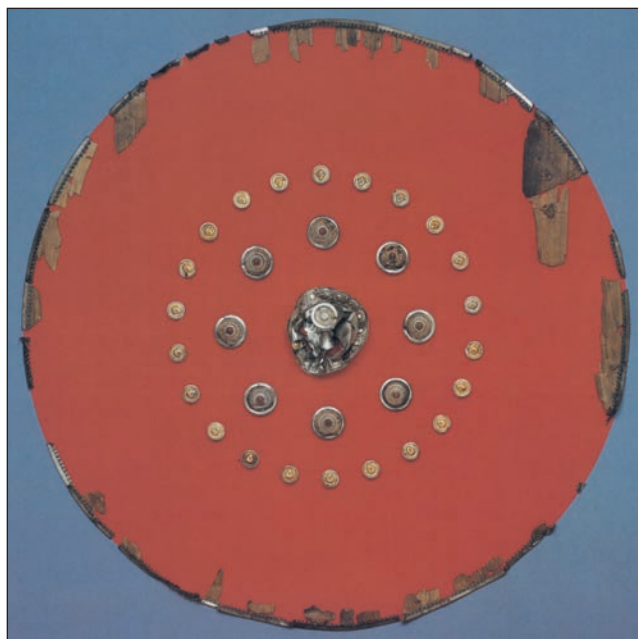


Figure 1. Illerup Ådal, deposit A; shield SAUB with its decoration in silver and gilded Pressblech. After v. Carnap-Bornheim and Ilkjær 1996, vol. 7, pl. 234.

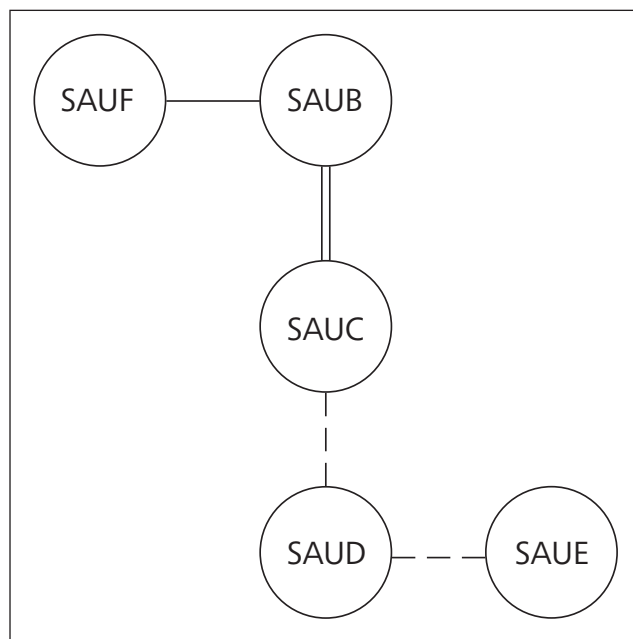


Figure 2. Illerup Ådal, deposit A; connections between five shield sets. lines: identical Pressblech; dots: identical measurements. After v. Carnap-Bornheim and Ilkjær 1996, vol. 5, fig. 261.



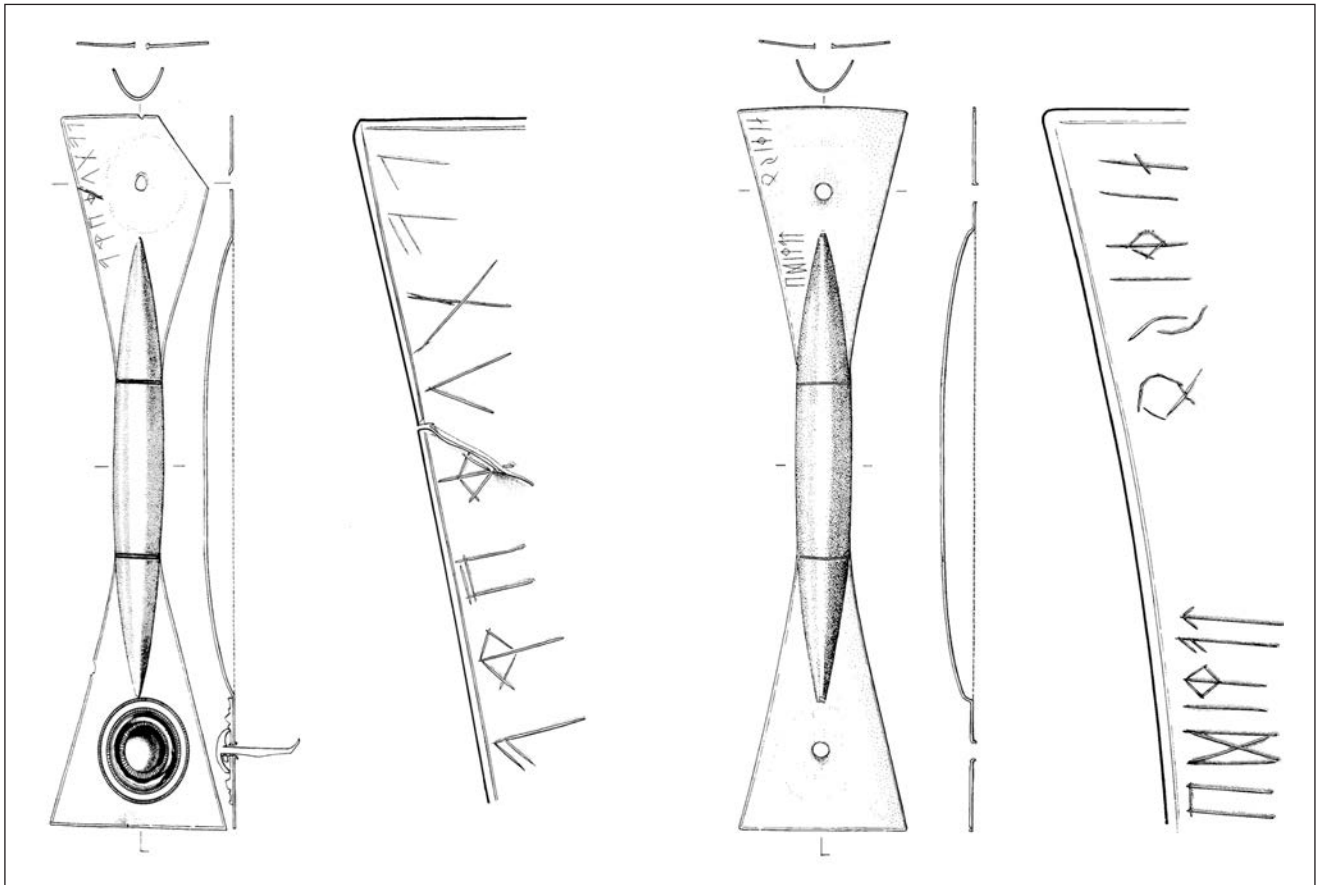


Figure 3. Illerup Ådal, deposit A. left: runic inscription *lagubewa*; shield grip WVI of set SAUE (after v. Carnap-Bornheim and Ilkjær 1996, vol. 5, fig. 41); right: runic inscription *nithijo tawide*; shield grip TWR of set SAUF. After v. Carnap-Bornheim and Ilkjær 1996, vol. 5, fig. 88; both without scale.



Figure 4. Thorsberg Moor; old and new reconstruction of the strip cap. After Matešić 2015, fig. 125.

Another remarkable feature of the SAUB set (v. Carnap-Bornheim and Ilkjær 1996, vol. 5, 231–33 with fig. 177) is that each of the shield rivets was decorated with the gilded imprint of a middle 2<sup>nd</sup> century AD Diva Faustina coin.

The iconographic meaning of the en-face masks from Illerup is unclear and is difficult to decipher with certainty. There are no clear attributes that would define them in Roman or Germanic imagery. However, it is conceivable that they could be interpreted as the reception or transformation of Roman motifs, which were also used as protective images on Roman armour (for an example of Lauersfort, see Matz 1932, 10, Taf. 1.). Here, there are good links to the two from Thorsberg Moor, whose total of 18 en-face masks can be addressed as bacchanalian motifs on the basis of the *corymb* iconography (for details see v. Carnap-Bornheim 1997, 82–83).

## The discs, the helmet and the sword belt hanger from Thorsberg Moor

It is relatively difficult to establish direct craft links between Illerup deposition A and the extensive early 3<sup>rd</sup> century AD deposition on Thorsberg Moor at a military elite level, as the material from Illerup is not as diverse as the material from Thorsberg Moor, which has a more Roman or Roman-influenced character. For example, there are still no helmets or *phalerae* from Illerup as they are known from Thorsberg Moor. However, there are close parallels in the opulent sword hilt fittings that were used on imported Roman sword blades (Illerup: sword hilt SAFN, SAFM and SAFH; v. Carnap-Bornheim and Ilkjær 1996, vol. 7, pl. 38, 107, 188; Thorsberg Moor, set 2 after Matešić 2015, 129–31, figs. 69–70). The multi-part handles SAFN, SAFM and SAFH from Illerup and the corresponding counterpart from Thorsberg Moor are made of solid silver, decorated with hammered zig-zag engraving and covered with gilded silver *Pressblech*. It is highly probable that they originated from a workshop in the Germanic *barbaricum*. It should also be noted that the early 3<sup>rd</sup> century deposit on Thorsberg Moor appears to be somewhat later than the large deposit A in Illerup, although the interpretation of the coin spectrums is not entirely unproblematic. Thus, there is a small chronological difference in the two groups of material, probably spanning only a few years, at most a decade (Bursche 2011, 76–77).

Let us now take a closer look at the material from Thorsberg Moor. The two discs, which were already described by Conrad Engelhardt in his first publication of these finds as very difficult to evaluate (Engelhardt 1863,

29; see also Blankenfeldt 2015, 253–55), are outstanding and a hitherto unique assemblage in the combination of Roman and Germanic motifs. With a diameter of 13.2cm, the two discs have identical dimensions; the inner structure of the surrounding ring zones with gilded decorative *Pressblech* and the Medusa heads are also identical. Their iconographic classification via the *corymbs* on the forehead of the respective masks can be regarded as certain. The two different pictorial programmes on the two discs are notable. Disc 1, with its depictions of the enthroned Mars, can be clearly linked to Roman pictorial models. In contrast, the animal frieze on disc 2 shows a pictorial programme that is more likely to be associated with Germanic ideas. As both discs have identical dolphin punch marks, they must have come from a single hand or workshop that was able to combine Roman and Germanic pictorial elements in a very special way.

The obvious combination of Proto-Roman and Germanic elements in items of elite equipment can be found in several other spectacular examples from Thorsberg Moor. Suzana Matešić recently presented fascinating individual observations, which are of great importance for our thematic complex, on the so-called strip cap and an unusual sword suspension from the site. Conrad Engelhardt presented a profile drawing of the silver face mask and the accompanying strip cap in the fontispiece of his 1863 publication on the find from the Thorsberg bog (Engelhardt 1863, fontispiece, 24, pl. 5, 3 and 4). Although discovered in different areas of the bog, Engelhardt combined the two pieces into one due to the matching helmet and strip cap, which he labelled the "Sølvkrone", silver crown (Engelhardt 1863, 24). The reconstruction drawing of the wearer of this helmet created by Magnus Petersen in 1863 (see Wiell 1997, cover with blurb and p. 251 with further references) took on an almost iconic character, although it did not appear to fit well anatomically, especially at the back of the head. The renewed analysis of the reconstruction history of the strip cap and the reassessment of the fitting points lead to a now convincing solution for the design and combination of face mask and strip cap (Matešić 2015, 196–203, 509–11, fig. 125; see also Matešić 2016; here Figure 4). Both elements now fit together exactly and can be convincingly associated with the Roman mask helmets of the so-called female type (Matešić 2015, 206–8, fig. 126). The deliberate combination of Roman and barbarian elements on this helmet from Thorsberg Moor is particularly evident in the dense row of bird head protomes found on both the face mask and the strip cap. In their formal design, they correspond entirely to those depictions that can also be found on the Type IA scabbard



Figure 5. Thorsberg Moor; scabbard slide. Left after Matešić 2015, Taf. 20. Right: X-ray tomography image of it with two pieces of a lead sheet. After Matešić 2015, Abb. 29. Both without scale.



slides, but also on other later Roman Iron-age militaria (e.g. shield boss from Gommern; see Becker 2010, 110, pl. 35, 62).

A further and particularly impressive example is a scabbard slide discovered by Conrad Engelhardt on Thorsberg Moor in 1858 (Engelhardt 1863, 42, pl. 10, 37; here Figure 5, left). This is undoubtedly the piece of the highest quality in this find group in Roman Iron-age Germanic *barbaricum*. The 25.5cm long and approximately 67g scabbard slide has a bronze base construction, each ending in two lunula-shaped plates. It is richly decorated with gilded silver *Pressblech* and profiled silver rivets (described in detail in Matešić 2015, 339–40, pl. 20; here with her inventory number M 144). The piece can be assigned to type IA due to the bridge designed as a bird head protome, which are known in larger numbers from war booty offerings, though less frequently from grave finds, and which can be dated to the beginning of the later Roman Iron Age (v. Carnap-Bornheim 1991, 7–12). In the case of the scabbard slide M 144 from Thorsberg Moor, it remained unnoticed for almost 150 years that the bridge on the back of the bird head protome is the only example of this group that is firmly closed by a metal plate. Suzana Matešić first realised that there must be something in this cavity because of a very slight noise when the scabbard slide was turned (Matešić 2015, 47).

A more precise analysis using X-ray and X-ray tomography images revealed two rolled up lead sheets, which were probably once a single sheet (here Figure 5, right). Despite the lack of comparable pieces from the Germanic *barbaricum*, and although there is no recognisable inscription, Matešić can convincingly prove that corresponding inscribed lead sheets are well known from the Greco-Roman world (Matešić 2015, 48–50). Lead sheets of this type are used as curse tablets (*defixiones*) and are associated with the gods of the underworld (Matešić 2015, 49). For the piece from Thorsberg Moor, such a contextual framework must remain open due to the inability to read a possible inscription on the rolled-up lead. A corresponding assignment will probably only be possible if one day the cover on the back of the bridge is removed and the sheet can be examined in its original state. Even if the documentation of Engelhardt's excavations on Thorsberg Moor generally does not allow the decided combination of objects into sets due to the circumstances of the find, Matešić (2015, 126–27, figs. 67–68) can determine sets against the background of individual elements of decoration, such as the somewhat profiled silver rivets or the use of gilded silver *Pressblech*. This enables a completely new classification of the material from Thorsberg Moor. For example, the mentioned scabbard slide M 144 can be combined with conical end fittings and linked to other



items of equipment, such as the so-called armoured clasps. For the find circumstances of scabbard slide M 144 and end fitting M 295 we refer to Matešić 2015, 309; Engelhardt mentions that both pieces were found situated next to each other.

## The magnificent finds from Illerup and Thorsberg and the concept of active or deliberate reception

The examples of fine smithing from Illerup and Thorsberg Moor presented here are closely associated with the military elites. In terms of material and craftsmanship, but also in their strongly symbolic character, they are exceptional assemblages that are considered as part of a system of military ranking against the background of the overall material of the respective deposits in the two bogs mentioned. They make it possible to broadly define the equipment of different levels in the military hierarchy in a way that would probably not be possible based on grave finds.

The Roman components of the respective sets are conspicuous for the splendid equipment from Illerup as well as from Thorsberg Moor, and they require further discussion. What could be the ideological background to the combination of Roman and Germanic elements and how could the practical implementation have been organised?

A certain degree of uncertainty existed early on in the categorisation of these phenomena. As early as 1863, Conrad Engelhardt wrote: “... og vort endnu mere ufuldstændige Kjendskab til den eiendommelige nordiske Konststil i den samme Periode gjør det meget vanskeligt af afgjøre, hvad der er romersk, hvad der er “barbarisk” Efterligning, og hvad der er eiendommelig gotisk eller nordisk Konst” “... and our even more incomplete knowledge of a distinct Nordic art style of the same period makes it very difficult to determine what is Roman, what is “barbaric” imitation, and what is peculiar to Gothic or Nordic art” (Engelhardt 1863, 29; author’s translation). On the two discs from Thorsberg Moor, Joachim Werner in 1966 referred thus to his work from 1941: “Today I am no longer quite so sure whether the first disc with the quadruple depiction of the seated Mars is really a provincial Roman work.” (Werner 1966, 22, 1941, 10–22 with the discussion of the circle of “Sacro workshops”; author’s translation). Johannes Brøndsted also argues in favour of the Germanic origin of the first disc in a brief comment: “The piece [the first disc] is obviously Germanic work, made according to the Roman model” (Brøndsted 1940, 204–5, fig. 202; author’s translation;

Brøndsted 1963, 212).

It was obviously of fundamental importance for the military elites of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century AD to integrate elements of Roman arts and crafts, such as magnificent shields, breastplates, heavy equipment and helmets into their military status symbols, or to combine these with local Germanic objects. From a purely technical point of view, this presupposes that the local smith producing the jewellery had the relevant knowledge and was ultimately also able to classify and interpret the selection and significance of the Roman components. The use of a stamp depicting the Roman god Mars on the first Thorsberg disc is probably the best example of this; the en-face masks on the magnificent shields from Illerup at least can be interpreted in this way. We must therefore assume that the producers had detailed knowledge of the conditions in Roman fine smithing workshops. Günter Moosbauer has compiled the corresponding written tradition and pointed out that these workshops “radiated artistically and in terms of craftsmanship beyond the periphery of the empire” (Moosbauer 2012, 121; author’s translation). There is no corresponding written Roman record of this (Kakoschke 2002, 570–3). We can however assume the individual mobility of fine smiths socialised in the Germanic *barbaricum* to the north-western provinces of the *Imperium Romanum*, though it cannot be ruled out with any certainty that Roman craftsmen were also active in the Germanic *barbaricum* (Table 1).

It is, however, remarkable that the objects presented here, with their relatively diverse figurative representations, do not reveal or form a comprehensive pictorial programme with different elements and abstractions that is legible to us today. This was undoubtedly present in the Roman Empire in the 3<sup>rd</sup> century AD and became characteristic of the art and craftsmanship of the Migration Period in northern Europe.

For the production process of the military elites’ artefacts from Illerup and Thorsberg Moor presented here, close coordination between the client and the maker was absolutely essential. Otherwise, neither the quality of the content nor the effect of the respective objects could be precisely determined and realised. It requires a fine smith with technical finesse and good background knowledge or special expertise to accomplish the corresponding tasks. It is therefore hardly surprising or coincidental that the first evidence of writing can be linked to this milieu at this time. The runic inscription *nīþijo tawide* on the TWR shield grip from the SAUF set (v. Carnap-Bornheim and Ilkjær 1996, vol. 5, 120–22, fig. 88, vol. 7, pl. 122) can be linked to the important group of *Tawide*-inscriptions and is probably the oldest evidence of this

Table 1. *Fine smiths in the mechanism of conscious reception.*

Roman production area	Germanic production area with the conscious reception of Roman models
Roman craftsmen with Roman training	Roman craftsmen with Roman training, active in the Germanic elite milieu
Germanic craftsmen with "Germanic" training in a Roman military context (auxiliary troops)	Germanic craftsmen with Roman training, active in the Germanic elite milieu

group of inscriptions (Rau and Nedoma 2012/2013, 70). It has already been pointed out earlier – albeit in a remotely published paper – that the *Tawide* (“has made”) inscriptions represent a translation or self-conscious adaptation of Roman “fecit” inscriptions (v. Carnap-Bornheim 1994, 53; on maker inscriptions on Roman bronze vessels in the *barbaricum*, see Petrovsky 1993; see also Imer 2004, 2010). Andreas Rau on the other hand points out that the early runic inscriptions of the Roman Iron Age “would illustrate the cultural distance between the southern Scandinavian area and the provincial Roman area” (Rau 2012, 373; author’s translation). Against this background, it is therefore hardly coincidental that the *Tawide*-inscription from Illerup was not written using Latin or Greek letters, but in a runic script adapted to the language’s own phonetics.

Could the phenomena presented here on the basis of a few selected finds from Illerup and Thorsberg Moor now be categorised more securely and conclusively? Could it be integrated into a more general concept that moves away from terms such as adoption, adaptation or influence and could offer further perspectives? The concept of “active or conscious reception”, which occasionally crops up in current art historical discussions, lends itself to this. It goes back to Michael Baxandall, who wanted to correct the misleading and monodirectional concept of “influence” in individual artistic creation and replace it with a far more differentiated concept (Baxandall 1985, 1990, 102–5). Christine Tauber recently summarised this field of conflict and its definitional reorientation: “The counter-model to influence thinking is that of conscious reception, reciprocal reference, the adaptation of formal and thematic models and their transformation in the act of appropriation for one’s own artistic expressive purposes.” (Tauber 2018, 15; author’s translation). With the conscious reception or perception of visual art by the viewer, a meaning is thus actively created, which is always already a first step in one’s own creativity.

With the concept of “active or conscious reception” as an act of appropriation and transformation, we find a suitable key for categorising the finds and equipment

presented here, as well as the runic inscriptions from Illerup and Thorsberg Moor. Individual aspects such as technical skills, knowledge of materials and the availability of the necessary raw materials play a fundamental role in this reception process. The decisive factor, however, is probably that both the client (e.g. *Lagubewa[R]*) and the craftsman (e.g. *Nithijo*) had a detailed common understanding of what was in this case a provincial Roman pictorial programme or a provincial Roman script, appropriated it and knew how to implement and artistically design it in a series of unusual objects and inscriptions (shields, helmets etc.). The conscious reception of Roman models in the military elites’ splendid equipment from Illerup and Thorsberg Moor is thus also an instrument of social stratification within the military formations, which carried out the military conflicts of the late 2<sup>nd</sup> to early 5<sup>th</sup> centuries AD in southern Scandinavia. This process once again demonstrates the structural depth and sustainability associated with these events. In addition to the importation of weapons and equipment and the mass production of shields, spears and javelins, a new mechanism of conscious reception of provincial Roman formal language now emerged, the signalling effect of which must have impressed both friend and foe.

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