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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. Øvreliid.

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The Bergkamen warrior: a Scandinavian-influenced late 7th-century AD high-status burial in Westphalia?

EVA CICHY AND ULRICH LEHMANN

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The 2011 discovery of an Early-medieval cemetery in Bergkamen, featuring notably the burial of a man with rich grave goods, highlights extensive cultural contacts during this period. The presence of multiple shields, unusual in Merovingian-period burials, but well-known from Vendel-period graves in Scandinavia, hints at dueling practices or high-status burial customs that apparently had come to be known to the man buried in Westphalia. The grave's rich inventory and the inclusion of items typically reserved for the upper social echelons suggest that the individual held a significant rank within his society, potentially as a leader or a warrior of high repute. This grave provides valuable insights into the funeral practices and social structures of Early-medieval Germany, particularly in the Westphalian region.

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Introduction

In 2011, remains of an Early-medieval cemetery were discovered on a hillside slightly sloping south towards the small river Seseke at Bergkamen in western Westphalia, Germany. The graves included the burials of a child, a woman, and a man (see Cichy and Aeissen 2012; Cichy and Lehmann 2023). Due to its numerous objects that indicate extensive cultural contacts, the latter (Grave 1) will be examined in more detail below. This burial, located not far from other significant archaeological sites in Westphalia, contained unique items, including a spatha, a seax, and three shields, which suggest high social status and possibly military leadership. Detailed analysis of the grave goods, especially the weaponry and belt fittings, indicates sophisticated craftsmanship and connections beyond the local region, possibly linking them to southern German or Scandinavian traditions.

The male grave

The male grave (Figure 1) was a chamber tomb in west-east orientation and with a base area of 2.4m x 1.8m. The

wood of the chamber walls was partially visible as dark lines in the ground. Similar discolorations in the north-east corner and centrally in front of the east wall likely are remnants of the floor planking made of parallel boards. Floor planks are well-documented in the region on the left side of the river Rhine (Koch 1996, 731), such as in the cemetery of Soest (Westphalia), 30km to the east (Peters 2011, 21–22). As in the graves at Soest, no remains of a coffin were recognised in Bergkamen (Peters 2011, 22). To the south, the grave chamber had an irregular shape, possibly due to the chamber's collapse on this side.

In the center of the grave was an oval disturbance, approximately 0.5m x 0.3m in size. Since neither weapons nor elements of the two belt fittings are missing, this is unlikely to be a grave-robber's shaft.

Some bone remains and the "shadow" of the corpse suggest that the deceased had been placed in the center of the chamber with his head to the west. This positioning predominates in the chamber graves of the cemetery in Dortmund-Asseln, about 9km to the south, and is likely for two graves at Bocholt-Lankern (Hernö 2007, 34),

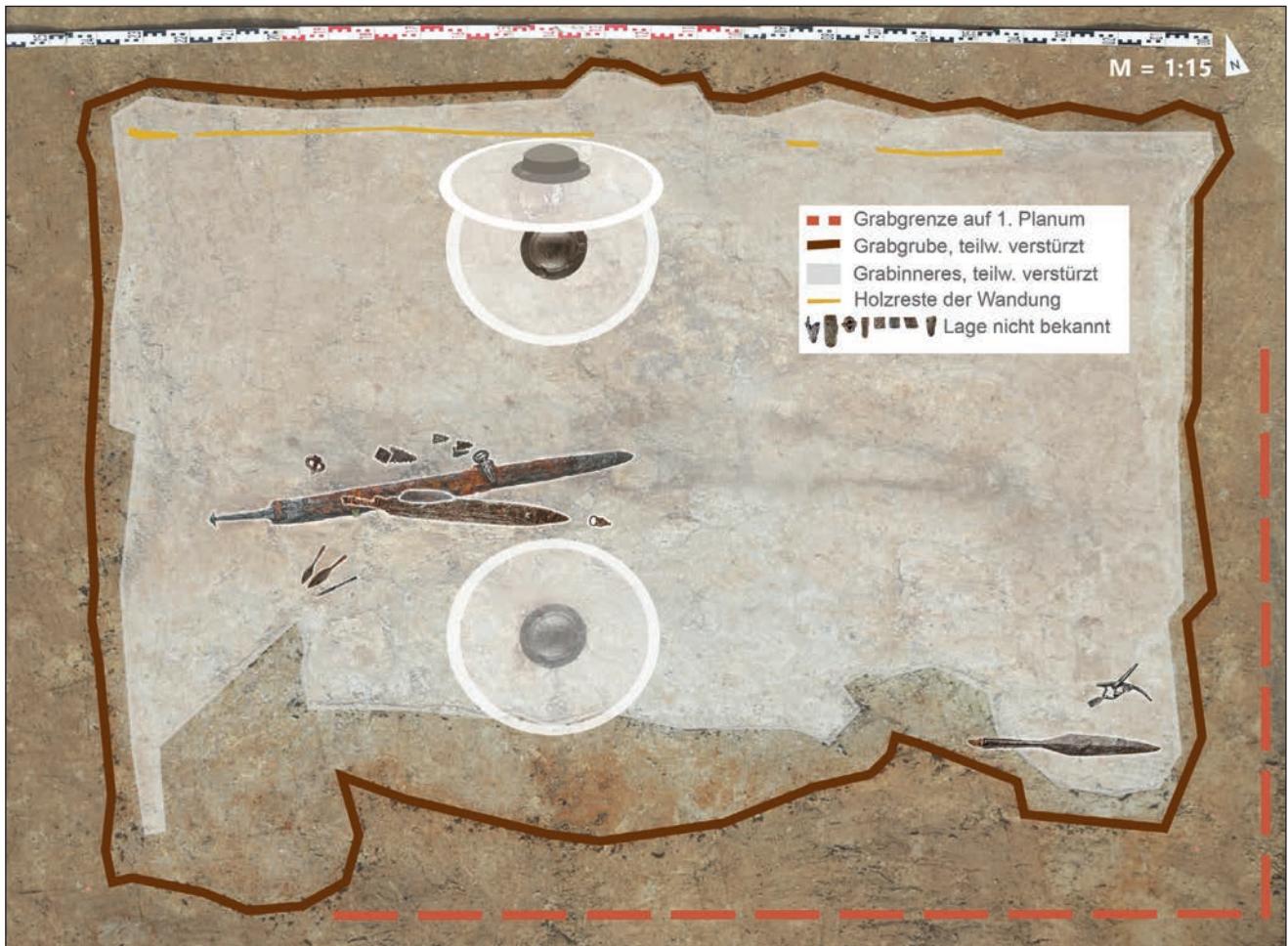


Figure 1. Grave 1, level 1 with grave goods (the position of the belt components is shown schematically due to block excavation. Graphic: LWL-Archäologie für Westfalen/H. Menne.

while in the Franconian area, it is rather unusual (Sicherl 2011, 22, note 53).

In the centre of the area indicated by the “corpse shadow” as the head and torso of the body, lay a spatha, a seax, and small knife. The burial also contained two belt sets, some of the buckles and fittings of which were found on or attached to the weapons, others lay next to them (Figure 1). Several objects were recovered together with the spatha and seax, but their exact relative position was not documented; the same applies to two stray finds (Figure 1) (see also Ankner-Dörr et al. 2013).

Finds

Seax

The iron seax has a length of 48cm, of which 38cm are the blade (Figure 2, 6). The width of the blade is 5cm, and the back bends towards the tip. Parallel to the back, two grooves, 3 and 4mm wide respectively, follow the bend near the tip. It is a heavy broad seax of Type Sax 2.2, which, on the basis of Rhenish parallels, belongs to the chronological Phases of the Lower Rhine area 6 to 9

(580/590 to ca. 710 AD) with a focus on the end of Phases 7 and 8 (640–670/680 AD) (Müssemeier et al. 2003, 44–46; cf. Westphal 2002, 180–83). However, comparative finds in the Westphalian area, especially in terms of blade width, barely reach the dimensions of the piece from Bergkamen.

Of the organic scabbard, the pointed tip (Figure 2, 7) features small and densely placed undecorated bronze rivets with lentil-shaped heads (diameter ca. 0.4cm). These hollow rivets are characteristic for the youngest type and were always used on the scabbards of broad seaxes (Koch 1982, 38). They are assigned to the Rhenish Type Sax 4.6 and dated to Phase 8 (640/650–670/680 AD). Only two chronologically relevant examples are known from the Rhineland area (Müssemeier et al. 2003, 47).

Spatha

The completely preserved spatha has a total length of 91.0cm (Figure 3), of which the blade accounts for 78.2cm. The blade is broken several times and slightly bent in the lower area due to soil pressure. One of the two



Figure 2. Grave goods from Grave 1. Photos and graphic: LWL-Archäologie für Westfalen/H. Menne, A. Müller.

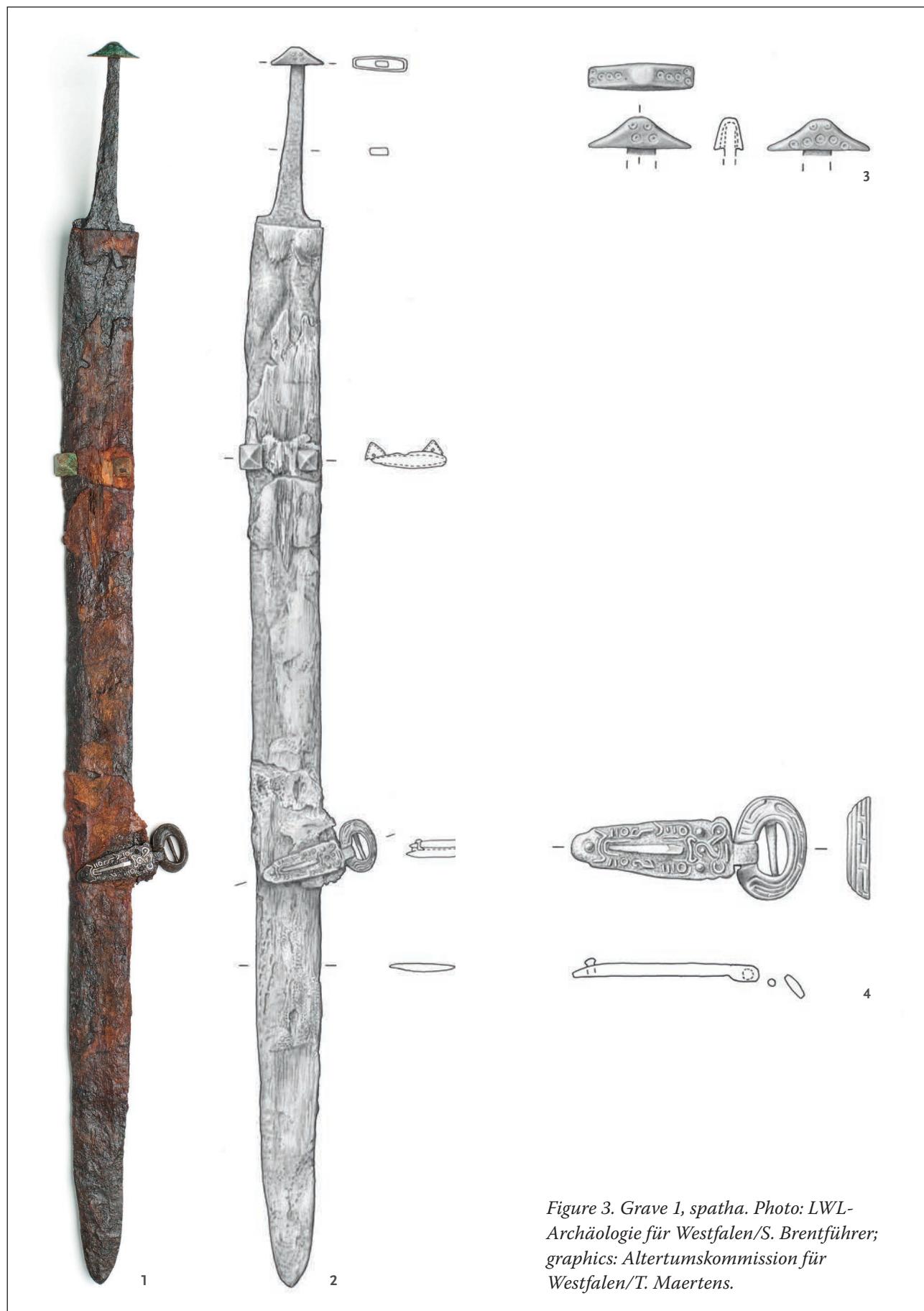


Figure 3. Grave 1, spatha. Photo: LWL-Archäologie für Westfalen/S. Brentführer; graphics: Altertumskommission für Westfalen/T. Maertens.

pyramid mounts of the suspension and the loop fitting of the strap still was attached to the blade. The spatha was extensively examined microscopically, with conventional radiography and 3-D X-ray computed tomography as part of a research project on double-edged swords of the Early Middle Ages from Westphalia (Lehmann 2016).

From the organic remains on the blade, the construction of the scabbard can be deduced. It consisted of two arched sheets of wood, probably made of beech (determined by Ursula Tegtmeier, Laboratory for Archaeobotany at the University of Cologne), which were lined on the inside with goat skin (determined by Sylvia Mitschke, Curt-Engelhorn-Center Archaeometry Mannheim). The usually ever-present leather covering on the outside (Lehmann 2007, 130–31) is missing, but the CT images suggest a leather cuff in the upper third of the scabbard at the level of the wooden belt loop, of which slight remains have survived. Instead, the wooden shells were covered by a plain weave fabric, which was most clearly visible under the loop fitting.

The spatha was carried by means of a two-point suspension system (Christlein 1971, 24, fig. 7, 3; Lüppes 2010; Marti 1995, 91, fig. 8b, 108, fig. 31; Menghin 1983, 150, fig. 90, 1; Neuffer 1972, 34–35, figs. 6–7). The belt loop and the weapon belt fittings consistently indicate a strap width of 1.3cm. The paired bronze pyramid mounts were located on both sides of the belt loop. A system with two straps in the scabbard's upper area, similar to the spatha from Grave 4 in Altdorf (Switzerland) from the second half of the 7th century, is likely (see Marti 1995, esp. 88–92). The lower point of the suspension is marked by the loop fitting, which is attached to the wooden sheet with a small nail. The tip of this nail is bent on the inside, so the loop must have been mounted before the two wooden sheets were joined together.

The spatha's pyramid-shaped pommel is made of non-ferrous metal, decorated on both sides with embossed circular "eyes", and riveted to the tip of the tang. All other elements of the handle were made of unspecified organic materials.

The blade is pattern-welded and has a complex structure (8 composite rods in 2 layers each). In the middle part, fields of parallel lines and semicircular patterns were visible (Lehmann 2016, 384–85, pl. 30, 2–3). The multi-part construction and the uniformly flawless workmanship indicate a work of superior craftsmanship, though not of the highest quality (Lehmann 2016, 316).

The dating is based on the trapezoidal pommel and the pyramid mounts. The former (Figure 3, 3) represents a shape of pommel that was common during the 6th century, is assigned to the Type Spa7E in the Lower Rhen-

ish chronology, and dated to Phases 5 and 6 (ca. 565 to 610/620 AD) (Müssemeier et al. 2003, 44). Trapezoidal pommels made of non-ferrous metal have a relatively long duration, according to Wilfried Menghin, and can be classified no more precisely than in his Groups B–E (480 to ca. 650) (Menghin 1983, 136, 137, fig. 77). The second reference point is provided by the pyramid mounts with a flat bar on the back made of non-ferrous metal, which on the Lower Rhine are assigned to Type Spa2B and thus to Phases 5–7 (ca. 565 to 640/650) (Müssemeier et al. 2003, 42–43). In southern Germany, they are also documented in younger find combinations of Koch's Phase 8 (Koch 1977, 47, 128–29 [Grave 622, pl. 167]). In Westphalia, pyramid-shaped mounts are only known from the spatha from Raesfeld-Erle (Lammersmann 1927, 27), but these are now lost. Three further, unpublished bronze single finds with flat bars on the back come from Warendorf-Einen, Marsberg-Giershagen, and Neuenkirchen. Based on this data, the spatha should be dated to the roughly 100-year period from about 570 to 670 AD.

Belt fittings

Spatha belt Type Civezzano

The components of the spatha belt that are preserved in situ on the scabbard can be clearly assigned to it: a loop fitting (Figure 3, 4) and two pyramid mounts (Figures 3, 1–2). A comparison with complete sets of this type (see Lüppes 2010, fig. 1) shows that at least nine further objects should be assigned to the belt as well: the larger main buckle of the main strap (Figure 4, 8), the associated tongue (Figure 4, 1), as well as a rectangular fitting (Figure 4, 5) and a slider (Figure 4, 4), which were attached to the main strap. A second slider (Figure 4, 7) should also belong to the main strap due to its nearly identical dimensions, although then a slider for the secondary strap would be missing. A diamond-shaped fitting (Figure 4, 6) connected the main and secondary straps. From the secondary strap, a tongue (Figure 4, 3), another buckle (Figure 4, 9), and a fitting (Figure 4, 2) are preserved.

All components feature the characteristic and widely documented decoration of abstract animal representations combined with geometric ornaments that are typical for the Civezzano Type. Spatha belts of this type are found mainly in southern Germany in the Alamannic and Bavarian settlement areas (see Peters 2011, fig. 72; Schwarz 2004, fig. 3 with list of find sites 1; Walter 2008, 171, note 564). Production sites in these areas are subject of discussion, just as the possibility of an origin further south, in central/northern Italy, or in the Merovingian-Franconian regions to the west (see e.g. Peters 2011, 97–99, Schwarz 2004, 68–71).



Figure 4. The fittings of the spatha belt from Grave 1. Photos: LWL-Archäologie für Westfalen/H. Menne.



Figure 5. Belt set components from Grave 1. Photos and graphics: LWL-Archäologie für Westfalen/H. Menne, A. Müller.

The widths of the main and secondary straps, at 2.3cm and 1.3cm respectively, match those of the comparison pieces from the south (Lüppes 2010, 561, tables 1–2). That the strap width probably was standardised and that the decoration was very similar is used as indicative of a "workshopcircle". However, in contrast to the sets from southern Germany, which regularly feature cross-shaped inlays, there is no decoration on the rivets from Bergkamen. The design, which otherwise corresponds in every detail to some southern German sets, makes a local imitation appear rather unlikely.

Complete sets are rare even in the main distribution area of the type. The ensemble from Bergkamen can only be matched to two almost complete sets from graves in Xanten Cathedral, Kreis Wesel, which is outside the actual distribution area (Müssemeier et al. 2003, 20–21; Siegmund 1998, 32, pl. 246). The Rhineland finds summarised under Type Spa1C are dated to Phases 7 and 8 (610/620 to 670/680 AD) (Müssemeier et al. 2003, 42). From Westphalia, only single finds have been reported from Soest (Peters 2011, 97–99 with map fig. 72) and Lünen-Wethmar (Lehnemann 2008, 51–52).

Fittings of the waist belt

The fragments of several iron belt fittings, which appear to be silver-plated, can be attributed to a belt set consisting of a large fitting, a counter fitting, and three small triangular fittings. All these pieces feature three rivets and profiled edges, meaning that their shapes basically follow the pairs of animal heads inlaid on the edges. Conventional X-ray images and an X-ray CT analysis of the square strap slider (Figure 4, 4) and two waist belt fittings (Figures 5, 2–3) have shown that the apparent silver plating was not genuine, however. Instead, twisted silver wires had been pressed flat into a roughened substrate and then polished over, which made the seams between individual wires invisible to the naked eye (see Gussmann 1994, 146–47). Additionally, all fittings feature inlays of non-ferrous metal wires. These were inlaid into pre-made grooves, at a deeper level than the silver overlays, which probably were also present on all three associated small triangular fittings with identical pattern (Figures 5, 3–5).

These fittings represent a development of the three-part sets found west of the Rhine, forming a clear contrast to the fashion of contemporaneous multi-part sets.

It has been suggested that the elaborately designed waist belts served as insignia of office or rank, akin to the ancient *cingulum militiae* (Fehr 1999, 110–11). The fittings generally can be aligned with Berthie Bilo-Trenteseau's Group II, characterised by an animal depiction without a border around the central field and by a great variety of edge decorations (Bilo-Trenteseau 1970, 256–60, 269, distribution map C). She proposes dating the fittings with this kind of decoration to the second half of the 7th century (Bilo-Trenteseau 1970, 263). Accordingly, the Rhenish examples summarised under Type S-Gür 4.7 are classified into Phase 8 (640/650–670/680) (Müssemeier et al. 2003, 21, based on Siegmund 1998, 32 [Gür 4.7]).

Good comparisons for the set can be found in the graves of Nijmegen-Lent, Province of Gelderland, Netherlands, including small triangular fitting plates very similar to the Bergkamen pieces (van Es and Hulst 1991, 121, 133) that date from 630 to 670 AD, with a possible continuation to the end of the 7th century (van Es and Hulst 1991, 120–21).

A little distance away from the other belt components, the bronze buckle with a fixed fitting (Figures 5, 6) was found at approximately hip level. Ursula Koch compiled various functions for buckles of this type, as a belt buckle, a pouch closure, or as part of a spatha suspension (Koch 1977, 77).

Arrowheads, lancehead, and bridle fragment

To the south of the swords lay a group of three arrowheads of different styles, and in the southeast corner of the grave, an iron lancehead of Type S-Lan 2.5 (Müssemeier et al. 2003, 49–50) was discovered sticking diagonally in the grave pit wall (Figure 2, 4). This method of deposition is common (Hinz 1969, 23) and also evidenced, for example, in the nearby cemetery at Dortmund-Asseln-West (Sicherl 2011, 32). In the Rhineland, this type is documented for Phases 7 to 9 (610/620 to ca. 710). In the same corner of the grave, the fragment of an iron curb bit with a simple outer loop of Oexle's Form I was found (Oexle 1992, 35–47) (Figure 2, 5). This placement in the grave also has been documented in Pflaumheim, Cologne-Müngersdorf, and Basel-Bernerring (Switzerland), although generally, the horse gear was laid on the right side of the deceased (Oexle 1992, 8–9). The type is known from grave contexts of the early 5th to (rarely) the later 7th centuries (Oexle 1992, 44); the youngest known specimens come from the Lower Rhine and the Netherlands.

Shields

Particularly unusual among the grave goods, is the inclusion of three shields: one shield boss was found to the

right, two to the left of the deceased, each at about the level of the torso, with the two shields in the northern half of the grave likely stacked on top of each other as the bosses were only 0.1m apart, with one slightly lower than the other (cf. Figure 1). The shield bosses vary in size, from 14.8cm (Figure 2, 3) to almost 20cm in diameter (Figure 2, 2). The two better-preserved shield bosses, which feature steep collars and flat domes and lack spike knobs, can be assigned to Type Sbu5A, which in the Rhineland is documented for Phases 6 to 9 (580/590 to ca. 710) (Müssemeier et al. 2003, 52–53).

Burials with several shields: geographical considerations

The inclusion of multiple shields in a Merovingian-period burial is unusual in all regions adjacent to the Rhineland, but it is documented in some of the rich Vendel-period boat graves in central Sweden. But even there, this custom is an exception. In Scandinavia at this time, a complete set of weapons, including a two-edged sword, sax, shield and lance, still was common in central Sweden and on Gotland, but is no longer found in Norwegian graves and on Bornholm and was moreover rare in graves in southwestern Germany (Jørgensen and Nørgård Jørgensen 1997, 101, fig. 92, 104, fig. 99; Nørgård Jørgensen 1999, 146).

But in Valsgärde near Gamla Uppsala (Sweden), Graves 5 (660–700/710) and 6 (660–700/710; Ljungkvist 2008, 13–18) and 7 (580/590; Gräslund and Ljungkvist 2011, 125) each featured three shields as grave goods (Arwidsson 1942, 43, 1977, 33), likewise most probably the grave of Ultuna (Arwidsson 1942, 44, note 4; Hildebrand and Hildebrand 1873, 1). Whether three also were included in the grave Vendel XI is unclear: Hjalmar Stolpe describes two (Stolpe and Arne 1927, 40), whereas Gretha Arwidsson points to the number of strap fittings, which may indicate three shields (Arwidsson 1942, 44 with note 4). Shields in groups of three are also depicted on contemporaneous helmets (Arwidsson 1983, 77). Finally, two shields are found in the burials Valsgärde 8 and 13 (Arwidsson 1983, 73) and outside Scandinavia in a southern English grave in Taplow in Buckinghamshire (Stevens 1884, 64, pl. 2, fig. 1).

Hjalmar Falk mentions several shields that were available to a fighter: "It seems to be an old custom in the north to assign a second to each of the fighters in a duel, who held their shield and replaced the worn shields [...] with new ones" (Falk 1914, 150; our translation; see also Arwidsson 1942, 44). Shield bearers have been mentioned since at least the 6th century in the service of Lombardic or Ostrogothic kings and they held additional shields

ready in battle to replace damaged ones (Falk 1914, 151). The Ostrogothic king Teja used three shields during the battle at Vesuvius in AD 553 (Arwidsson 1942, 44). While the number three might seem to have been chosen arbitrarily, Arwidsson emphasises that the trio of shields in the grave Valsgärde 6 is no coincidence: “as far as we know, there was an old practice in the north according to which each fighter in a duel had the right to use up 3 shields” (Arwidsson 1942, 44; our translation). This refers to the Icelandic *Kormak’s Saga*, which likely was written down in the 13th century (Arwidsson 1983, 73) and which in chapter 10 describes the rules of the holmgang, including the shields of the combatants: “Each gets 3 shields, but once these are used up, the combatants must step back onto the hide, even if they had moved away from it earlier, and defend themselves there with their weapons alone” (Böldl et al. 2011, 81; our translation). In the account of a fight (chapter 12), it is stated again that “each received three shields” (Böldl et al. 2011, 90; our translation). According to Arwidsson, “[t]he presence of three shields in warrior-graves [...] suggests that duelling may go back at least to the Vendel period” (Arwidsson 1983, 73).

While it is tempting to discern in the “three-shield burials” specific indications of duelling practices that, according to later written sources, were common in Scandinavia, several aspects argue against such an interpretation. As the graves Valsgärde 8 and 13 each feature “only” two shields, it is clear that the number three was not strictly set in the Vendel Period. Also, the objects occasionally represent different values: the shields I and III from Valsgärde 6, for example, feature numerous metal fittings and richly decorated bosses and were deposited together, while shield II is significantly simpler in construction and was separated from them in the grave (Arwidsson 1942, 24, 35–41, pl. 6–11, 44; cf. Valsgärde 5) (thanks are due to John Ljungkvist, Uppsala University, for this and further important information on the shields from Valsgärde, by email, 03. March 2022). Such a separation of the shields also can be observed in the burial at Bergkamen (see above), though due to poor preservation, no statements can be made about different qualities of the objects. Were the more elaborately crafted shields even intended for combat, or were they merely prestige objects? Not only regarding shields, but the grave goods in Vendel-period boat graves in general, there is a discussion whether they represented the personal gear of the deceased or whether the grave goods were selected from a collective stockpile of equipment stored for this purpose (Odebäck 2021, 36, 189).

Multiple shields in a grave also are found in the Viking-age burials of the 9th and especially the 10th centu-

ries, in Norway, for example, they occur in 74 of about 3400 graves. Like the Vendel-period comparisons, these graves almost always featured rich equipment (Grieg 1947, 19–23). With regard to the graves of the “Norwegian-western area”, Heiko Steuer discusses the possibility that, since multiple shield bosses often are associated with a boat burial, the majority of shields does not represent the gear of one man, but rather a ship’s equipment (Steuer 1970, 378). The shields, he suggests, expressed a commander’s “military authority” over several warriors” or the status of a leader (Steuer 1970, 378; our translation). Given that there were 64 shields in the ship at Gokstad, 28 and 8 examples, respectively, in the two ship graves at Myklebostad, and 21 shield bosses in the boat grave on the Ile de Groix (Brittany, France), the argument is plausible. Most graves, however, feature significantly fewer (mostly two or three, very rarely four) shield bosses (Grieg 1947, 19–23).

Is it a coincidence that several shields were placed in the Bergkamen grave, or could it be possible that the custom expressed in the richly equipped Scandinavian burials was known to the man buried there or his descendants? Steuer points out that the “common lifestyle with the central role of the martial aspect of existence spread out customs and objects throughout Europe” and that this also reflected the mobility of the time (Steuer 1987, 190; our translation). He paints the picture of an elite in the army made up of high-ranking warriors “from the most diverse [...] tribes of Germanic peoples [...] who were paid with gold, weapons, and land, but who not only constantly stayed in the king’s vicinity, but also returned to live on their large estates, where they were buried, if they had not died on a war campaign far away” (Steuer 1987, 190; our translation). It can be assumed that “in that mobile era, warriors from the North could serve in the Merovingian Empire, and that the men in such warrior retinues could come from the most diverse areas of origin” (Steuer 1987, 221; our translation).

There is concrete evidence for the relationships between the emerging Scandinavian warrior aristocracies and the Merovingians in the archaeological finds of northern European graves since the 6th century, particularly in weapon equipment and riding gear (Arrhenius 1983, 64–66; Ljungkvist 2009, 43, 46; Nørgård Jørgensen 1999, 174).

Egon Wamers describes the individuals buried in the Vendel-/Merovingian-period graves at Vendel and Valsgärde as “sub-royal”, high-ranking mounted warriors who were employed as administrators and assumes “that this Nordic warrior elite served in high positions in the South, as *clibanarii/cataphracts* and probably in the

bodyguard of a ruler" (Wamers 2018, 233; our translation).

Regarding southern Germany, Koch points to grave finds that suggest the service of "Norsemen as warriors and retinue leaders in the Frankish Empire" (Koch 1999, 183–87; our translation). In this context, reference should also be made to the shield from the Rhenish grave at Morken (Rhein-Erft-Kreis) that has long been considered a Scandinavian product (Arrhenius 1983, 45). The Scandinavian influence in the South, however, ends simultaneously with the decline of the Austrasian royal house at the beginning of the 7th century (Koch 1999, 192; Schmauder 2018, 205), essentially during a time when the individual buried in Bergkamen might still have been a child.

On the other hand, some Early-medieval graves in present-day Westphalia show strong connections to the Frankish Empire. The owners of the two ring-swords found in Grave 61 at Bad Wünnenberg-Fürstenberg and Grave 13 at Beckum II probably had joined Frankish armies (see Lehmann 2016, esp. 295–96), as pommel rings were issued only to high-ranking warriors in the royal retinue (Steuer 1987, 222). The connections are also evident in other grave goods of the deceased at Beckum, which, according to Vera Brieske, appear to be "extraordinarily Frankish" (Brieske 2011, 127; our translation). In the case of the richly furnished women's graves at Soest, which are very similar in terms of grave construction, Daniel Peters observes an "actively maintained participation in the polyethnic political construct of the Frankish Merovingian Empire" and calls the dead "Frankish", "regardless of an actual geographical or even biological origin" (Peters 2011, 182; our translation).

The extraordinary association of objects (spatha set plus shields) may suggest that the individual buried in Bergkamen came into contact with warriors from other regions, perhaps as a mercenary, and in this way became acquainted with the customs of a northern European warrior aristocracy. The Bergkamen spatha set alone indicates a certain mobility, which Frank Siegmund also postulates for the individual buried in Grave B22 in Xanten I: based on the spiral-inlaid belt set and parts of a belt set of the Civezzano type in that grave, he assumes that this individual either spent part of his life in southern Germany or originated from there (Siegmund 1998, 240–41).

Tomb form and grave goods as expressions of social role and status

The dating of the burial primarily is based on the silver-plated fittings of the waist belt, which are classified as belonging to the second half of the 7th century. The com-

bination of broad seax, bi-chrome-inlaid and silver-plated belt buckles and fittings, as well as lanceheads with narrow, leaf-shaped blades and closed sockets is also considered quite typical for the Middle Rhine area of Phase JMIIB (670/680–710/720) (Saal 2014, 385, fig. 123). The spatha possibly was an older piece that had been used for some time before it was deposited in the ground. The burial at Bergkamen is the only grave in Westphalia that reliably contained a spatha from the period of the middle or the second half of the 7th century (Lehmann 2016, 84). It is also one of the few Westphalian examples of a burial from this period that was furnished with rich grave goods (Grünwald 2005, 76).

The construction of a chamber tomb – with its disproportionate size and the considerable amount of labor and expense involved – suggests that special care was taken. The elaborate burial structures are an expression of the need for representation of a high-ranking class of society; it seems to have been an accepted norm that chamber tombs were reserved for members of the upper classes. The effort involved in tomb construction usually is reflected in an assortment of high-quality grave goods (Peters 2011, 154, 164), as is evident in the male Bergkamen grave.

Rainer Christlein's (Christlein 1966, 89–92, 1975, 1978, 20) seminal system for the comparative assessment of the composition and value of Early-medieval grave goods still is largely recognised and forms the basis of our interpretation. Criticisms include points that are also relevant for the classification of the Bergkamen grave, such as considerations of regional peculiarities, changes in the grave goods custom over time, that grave goods were interpreted solely as expressions of individual wealth, and that variations in the furnishings only represented certain age groups (see Brather 2005, 159; Burzler 2000, 120–27, 2002, 322; Döhrer 2011, 9–11).

According to Bernhard Sicherl, members of a land-owning class in Westphalia did not have the same access to prestige goods as Franks and Alemanni. The relative lack of such valuable goods can be explained, he states, by a less comprehensive integration of the elites in northwestern Germany into the Frankish rule and its distribution networks (Sicherl 2011, 159–60).

The rarity value or exclusivity (see also Burzler 2000, 100) of certain prestige goods in the northwestern German context is, however, insufficiently considered in a slightly modified adoption of Christlein's model: a nearly complete spatha set of the Civezzano type is likely to be evaluated differently in Westphalia than in a southern German grave.

Furthermore, Anke Burzler points out that regarding the grave goods “quantity is complemented by quality, by taking into account the workmanship, including decoration, exclusivity, and rarity value” (Burzler 2000, 100). Accordingly, as previously indicated, a nearly complete spatha set of the Civezzano type in Westphalia is to be weighed differently in quality than a similar find in a southern German grave. The warrior buried in Bergkamen can thus be associated with a group of people who took on leadership roles within society.

Burzler further argues that “ideas seem to influence the selection of grave goods that serve to document the lifestyle and the reputation of the individual or family” (Burzler 2000, 100). Following Arwidsson’s explanations that the inclusion of three shields in graves may be related to Early-medieval duelling rules (Arwidsson 1983, 73), the inclusion of three shields in the Bergkamen grave similarly could express certain notions or rules that the warrior had learned abroad and brought home with him, and that shaped his lifestyle.

Conclusion

The Bergkamen grave discussed here occupies a special position: not only does it feature an extensive, comparatively rich set of grave goods, it is also the only known grave in Westphalia that included a spatha from the mid-7th century (Lehmann 2016, 84).

Based on his grave goods, the man buried in a chamber grave probably had been a mounted warrior of high social status and considerable mobility. He learned and adapted foreign customs and practices. Among the comprehensive and high-quality grave goods of the warrior, who by Westphalian standards was remarkably well-equipped with a spatha belt with a complete set of fittings of the Civezzano type and a silver-plated waist belt, the grave is distinguished particularly by the addition of three shields.

This probably identifies him as a military leader (cf. Steuer 1970, 377–78), whose status was to be given special emphasis by this highly unusual combination of grave goods, which makes this burial unique in the region.

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