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a cura di
MARCO MERLO, ANTONIO MUSARRA, FABIO ROMANONI E PETER SPOSATO



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Ring-sword in Early Medieval Europe

by VLADIMIR T. VASILEV, PhD

ABSTRACT. The purpose of this article is to summarize information on the appearance and symbolic significance of ring-swords from different regions of Western Europe dating back to the V – VII c. Based on archaeological data, written sources and previous publications, I will attempt to clarify the meaning and purpose of the ring-swords. In-depth study of the data of sagas and traditions in comparison with archaeological finds would reveal the symbolism of rings on swords of the so-called Migration Period.

KEYWORDS: RING-SWORD, PATTERN-WELDED, SAGS, EARLY MIDDLE AGES, ARISTOCRACY, SYMBOLISM.

Introduction

The sword is one of the symbols of Western Europe in the early Middle Ages. In this vast region, this symbol is inherited from the earlier eras. As before, the sword is the representative weapon of the military elite. The manufacture of swords is rare and complex in German tribes. The production of these swords significantly differs from the swords of the Roman army. During the Migration Period in Western Europe (4th - 8th century) great regard was paid to the workmanship of the sword. The strongest symbolic and mystical element of the sword is the ring placed on the handle of the pommel, in some of the found swords. It is also known as ring-sword.

The purpose of the article is to summarize the information on the appearance, development, and importance of the ring-sword, by examining archaeological data, written sources and previous publications. The ring-swords are a reason for lively discussion among the researchers, many of the existing theories are subject to criticism and do not clear some main issues about the ring-swords.

Typology and periodization

Typology and periodization of ring-sword are comparatively clear. They are based on the discovered specimens and the date of the graves, but completing the

database with new examples may affect the frameworks related to periodization, geographic distribution, and purpose. Rings on the swords are disseminated between the 5th and 8th centuries and they are divided into four groups. It is certain that some pommels were specifically made so that a ring could be attached to them; others are not designed for such a purpose but are changed in order to have a ring attached to them.

Fig. 1 presents the main four types of riveted rings. They can be divided into two groups - real rings (1) and pseudo-rings (2). Type 1a is the earliest and most rare form of a ring-sword. The ring is part of the rivet of the handle holding the upper guard. For type 1b, the ring attached with a half-ring, which attached with is two rivets, one passing through the back guard and the other through the pommel. The ring itself no longer moves freely but is welded to half-ring. The second group represented by type 2a and 2b in Fig. 1 are decorative “pseudo-rings” - the ornaments are massive and they are not so movable like the first group. The difference between the two types consists in the fact that for type 2b, the rings have tightly adhered to each other and there are no openings found in type 2a. Type 2b is most impressive because it is massive and the material from which it was made of solid gold, unlike the previous ones, which are made of bronze, gilded bronze or silver.

The appearance of the ring-swords

There is still a discussion between scholars about the purpose and earliest appearance of the ring-swords. It is assumed that the ring has a special military or social significance. Elis Behmer and Greta Arwidsson think that type of ring-sword originates from continental Europe, with the earliest examples being from the provinces of Arue, eastern France and Mainz-Kastel, western Germany [Arwidsson 1954, p.64, Behmer 1939, p. 135]. Arwidsson also writes that the precursors of rings are the amber and spheres of amber, glass, and other materials found in 5th century swords of Aleman and Frankish graves. The presented theory by Kurt Böhner of origins of the rings of Scandinavia is based on the fact that on the peninsula, the evolution of the rings can be traced throughout the period of their use [Böhner 1958, p. 167]. Hilda Davidson rejected that in the book *The Sword in Anglo-Saxon England*, due to the earlier examples found in Kent, England [Elis-Davidson 1962, p. 74]. However, ribbed rings are common in the Scandina-

vian Peninsula, and can be traced to their development over the various periods. Rings found in Kent, according to the study by Baldwin Brown [Brown 1915, p. 221] are earlier than the Francs and Scandinavian specimens. Hilda Davidson also supports this theory. Ewart Oakeshott has another point of view. He notes in his book "Sword in Hand" that the earliest found rings are two, one from Kent and the other from Scandinavia, but by analysis of the swords, he concludes that both have a frankish origin [Oakeshott 2000, pp. 23-24]. This question remains open. After more archaeological excavations and enough finds can be discovered to determine with greater precision where the ring-sword appears for the first time. Here we see at least four of the basic theories about where the rings are coming from. Disputes over their origins will not stop soon, although the oldest ones are in Britain and Scandinavia. To this day, Oakeshott remains unconfirmed with his theory of their frankish origin.

Purpose

While the question of the origin and the earliest appearance of swords with rings is placed in some context, the question of its purpose is even more complex and debatable. There are many theories about the purpose of the ring, as it I will present only those that are most supported by scientists. It is supposed that the ring has served to attach a belt or cord to it, to attach an amulet to firmly attach the sword to the scabbard, or as a counterweight [Ellis-Davidson 1962, p. 75]. These theories are now obsolete and rejected by the majority of scholars. We know from a source that straps are attached to the sword handles of this period, but on the other hand, why have so few rings been found? Later types of rings did not have the ability to strap through the ring due to the absence of an opening. On the same grounds, the assumptions that the ring is used to attach to the scabbard and place a mask are also abandoned. Its use as the counterweight is also rejected because open specimens are hollow and cannot have such a function. The main conclusion, which is supported by most researchers, is that the ring has a ritual or symbolic meaning.

Symbolic meaning

The circle, ring, and arm-ring have a great symbolic meaning in the culture and mythology of the German peoples of the continent, the Anglo-Saxons, and

the Scandinavians. The circle is an ancient symbol of unity, integrity, of the sacred space, of the Earth. Since it has no beginning and no end, it embodies infinity and eternity. In northern mythology, the circle can be seen in *Uroboros* and *Jormundgand*, which in both cases is a giant snake biting its tail. *Uroboros* is a symbol of infinity, of the eternal circle, of the fact that at each end corresponds to a new beginning in constant repetition, eternal self-renewal, death and birth. The symbol of the circle is woven into the ring and the arm-ring.

There are two types of bracelets – for wrist and over the elbow. From the old epochs and sagas, we understand that the bracelet above the elbow is a kind of reward, and when they were made of gold or silver - it demonstrates the high social status of its owner. From the Beowulf saga, we learn that bracelets define the relationship between two personalities and have symbolic associations. They are given by king, earl or *dryhten* as a binding gift between the master and his follower. Also as a prize for courage or faithful service [Ellis-Davidson 1968, p. 73]. In this way, the master appears himself like ring-giver (*béag-gifa*). The North Mythology mentions Draupnir, the golden bracelet of god Odin. Every ninth night of her fall eight new bracelets, each with the size of the original but not magical [Bellows 1923, pp. 113-114]. They were given to deserving warriors and trusted men.

Archaeological information

The ring-sword carries a similar symbol as the ring, the arm-ring and the circle. In order to reach the deeper meaning of the ring-swords, we must pay attention to the archaeological evidence. First, it must be mentioned that it is found mainly in the richest graves of the aristocracy, but not with kings. Secondly, some of the discovered specimens were made with the sword handle, but some were further mounted and even repaired several times. Third, some of the discovered swords, all over Europe find traces of a ring on the handle, but the ring itself is missing [Übersicht 1987, pp. 206 - 214, Oakeshott 2000, pp. 23-24, Truc 2012, pp. 59-62, Evison 1967, pp. 63-80].

From this information, we can conclude that swords with rings are only found in some of the graves, but not in all. The lack of rings in the rulers' grave, on the other hand, shows that they were reserved only for part of the aristocracy. Along with that, we know that the rings are few. And it can be concluded that they have

been given certain merit or demonstrated some degree of dependency. Whether the ring is made together with the sword or later it is understood that this privilege, if I can call it, has been acquired with the sword, or the ring is subsequently placed on the sword handle, owned by the warrior. The lack of ring from the handle on some of the graves indicates that the ring has been dismantled for some reason. It may be due to the death of the owner that the ring was returned to the one who gave it to him because of the use of the sword by a man who has not earned the ring, which is common practice throughout the period. This also shows that this privilege was not hereditary.

Here is the time to mention one of the last important discoveries about ring-swords. The find, already known as the Staffordshire Treasure, was discovered near Lichfield, Central England, Staffordshire County (2009) and represents a large deposit of artefacts. There are three sword handles with rings (K136, K163 and K291). Since they were in a very bad condition, they were assembled and restored in 2015. They were dated to the middle of the 7th century, containing not a single ring but two on both sides on the pommel (Fig. 2). It is clear from the image that the rings are type 2b and are typical for the end of the period during which they were used, namely the middle of the 7th century. They are richly decorated with gold and garnished with garnet and glass [Butterworth, Greaves, Fern 2018]. These three cases have been isolated and so far no other artefact has been found with two riveted rings. Their purpose has not yet been clarified, but it is believed that the sword belonged to someone with an important status. From this, we can conclude that the holder was at a higher level in the hierarchy. If we assume that at the end of the period of use these rings have lost their functional significance as it was at the beginning of their use, then we can assume that they lose their symbolic meaning - they just become decorations. No additional evidence, of course, support this.

Among the swords, with riveted rings, there is a sword with an unusually placed ring, not like the others on the pommel, but on the lower guard, on the side of the blade. The ring is no different from the examples of the type 1a except for its location in the sword (Figure 3). The sword was found in Snartemo, Hægebostad, Vest-Agder county, Sweden and was to the early 6th century. The sword is Behemer type 5, with extraordinary gold ornamentation. It is supposed that its owner to attach the sword to the scabbard to be secured used this riveted ring. This is the only such sword which suggests that what we read so often in sagas

can be seen in reality. Linguists translate this type of sword attachment into the scabbard with the word *fridbond* or *peace-strings*. There is no word in Bulgarian language to summarize this attachment [Oakeshott 1994, p. 115].

The saga *Gisli Surssons*, which says, can give such a similar example:

„He wore a hat from Gardariki and a grey cloak and a gold fibula on his shoulder; and he carried a sword in his hand.“ Two boys came walking up to him. “The older boy said: ‘Who is the noble-looking man sitting here? Saw never I a better-looking or more dignified man.’ Thorkel answered: ‘Thou speakest well; I am called Thorkel.’ The boy said: ‘The sword in thy hand must be very precious; wilt then allow me to look at it?’ Thorkel answered: ‘This is strange, but I will allow thee to look,’ and handed the sword to him. The boy took the sword, turned a little aside, unloosed the peace bands and drew the sword. When Thorkel saw this, he said: ‘I did not allow thee to draw the sword.’ ‘I asked no leave from thee,’ said the boy; and he brandished the sword and struck at the neck of Thorkel, taking off his head.” [Du Chaillou 1889, p. 84, Dasent 1866, pp. 88 – 89]

From the sagas and the epics, it became clear why *fridbond* had to be used on the swords to avoid the hasty, insatiable and unrestrained killing, common in the literature. On the other hand, it is not mentioned anywhere that the swords are attached to their scabbards with the use of rings on the swords. Together with the only such sword, mentioned above, it can be concluded that the purpose of the ring was not to attach the sword to the scabbards.

Among the archaeological finds, there are a few on which a ring-sword are depicted or reproduced. To date, no other ring images have been found. These are two plates found in Torslunda and Vendel, both in Sweden, of helmets with images of warriors holding swords, with rings. An image of *cynocephaly*, on the sword scabbard from Sigmaringen, Germany, holding a sword with a ring on the handle in his left hand. The other artefacts are an imitation of ring-sword, not from swords, but placed on a shield (Sutton Hoo, England) and a drinking horn (Valsgarde, Sweden) [Übersicht 1987, pp. 222-227].

Of the applications of Fig. 4 a and b, once parts of helmets, depicted warriors and aristocrats, as the sword is a privileged weapon. Interesting is the fact that they hold their swords and are not attached with a belt for their waist, which can be assumed to be ready for battle. The sources often mention that the warriors hold the sword handle to indicate that a battle will be fought. Paul the Deacon writes in his *History of the Langobards*:

“Chapter 1:24: In turn, all the Lombards, ready for war, laid their hands on their swords handles.” [Gagova 2011, p. 40]

In the present case, however, we see the opposite. In both applications, the warriors, as it became clear, held their swords in front of themselves, in their scabbards. Their copies are pointed with blades to the ground, which can be interpreted as giving honours (Present arms command), a symbol of obedience. This is confirmed also from their clothing and helmets, dressed with their finest arms and equipment, presented to their master. The Torslunda application clearly shows that only the first of the two warriors wears a sword with a ring on the handle, indicating that not everyone has been holding such a ring during the period. In Fig. 4 c, we see a sword applique depicted by cynocephaly described by Paul Deacon in *History of the Langobards* as a fierce, fearless and bloodthirsty creature. Fig. 4 d and e show the unusual use of rings type 2b placed on a shield and a drinking horn. Due to the rich content of the grave, it is assumed that the owners of these objects are of extremely high status and great wealth. There is also a ring-sword of the same type in the grave where the drinking horn is found. The very representation of the rings on the swords shows their significance for the period and the age. Their symbolic meaning is getting stronger; the five artefacts examined so far have rather a parade significance than real use. They were used during ceremonies and feasts in order to present the status of their owner. At the end of the period of use of ring-sword (the first half of the 7th century), their popularity is highest and therefore the work is the most impressive. It comes to the fact that they are placed not only on the swords but also on other objects - shields and horn for drinking.

Dissemination

The use of rings on a sword is especially popular at the end of the Migration Period, and their distribution is found among the Franks, Saxons, Alemans, Langobards, Anglo-Saxons and Scandinavia. In Fig. 5 you can see a map of their distribution depending on their type and material of manufacture [Übersicht 1987, p. 209]. The map clearly shows the areas on which different types of rings are found. On the continent, the type 1b rings made of silver are the most common. In Britain, the most popular are rings of type 1a made of silver, and in Scandinavia, there is a distribution of rings of type 2a and 2b, whose material, workmanship and size are most impressive.

Fig. 6 shows 70 ring-swords¹ with their detection spot, and the numbered map markings can be found in application 1.

In the article written by Marie-Cecile Truc “Probable Frankish burials of the sixth century AD at Saint-Dizier”, an interesting map of the French graves (Fig. 7) containing the 6th-century ring-sword is presented. It should be noted that the graves containing rings are among the richest and belonged to the highest ranking nobles. Truc describes the distribution of the Frankish graves on the periphery of the French kingdom by interpreting this as securing the power of Clovis I and his descendants in Gaul with loyal people [Truc 2012, pp. 59-60]. The map clearly shows the distribution of the rings and the territories it covers. They coincide with the expansion of the borders of the Salian Frankish kingdom. Obviously, the King of the Franks has secured his new possessions by giving rings to the higher aristocracy. As we have seen above, the acceptance of these rings shows that their owners have sworn allegiance to the King and in fact, recognize their joining to the borders of the kingdom.

Written sources

Sources that mention rings on swords, rings, arm-rings, and swearing on them are few. These are basically myths and sages, and we have some information from other written sources. There is much evidence of the importance of the oaths placed on the ring and the sword. Such examples are found in the work of Venantius Fortunatus² in the poem Gelesvintha-Elegie dedicated to Galswintha³, lines 241 - 242, where we read:

“The armed ranks swear an oath on their weapons in their own right, that they would be loyal to her, and bind themselves by law.” [George 1995, p. 47]

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- 1 Of course, all the swords with rings that have been discovered are not marked on the map, but only those for which I have data.
 - 2 Venantius Fortunatus (*Venantius Honorius Clementianus Fortunatus*), born 540 in Valdobbiadene, Treviso, Italy, died between 600 and 610 in Poitiers, France. Poet and hymnodist at the time of the Merovingians and a bishop of Poitiers. Venantius writes a *Versepos* in four books about St. Martin of Tours (*De virtutibus Martini Turonensis*), dedicated to Gregory of Tours.
 - 3 Galswintha (550 - 567) (*Galswinthe, Gailswintha, Galsuintha, Galswintha, Galsuenda, Galeswintha, Galswint*) is a Frankish queen of Gothic origin. Wife of King Chilperic I from Neustria. Killed by her husband.

This citation shows that these relationships are defined by the law in the Frankish kingdom and include the strengthening of the contract with an oath on their weapons.

In the later chronicle, Fredegar⁴ mentions an agreement between the Franks and Saxons with oaths on their weapons [Oakeshott 1994, p. 102]. In addition to the oath the text also describes the traditional rituals of this kind, the clanging of the weapon.

“In the 10th year of his reign (631), Dagobert learned that an army of Wends invaded Thuringia. He gathered an army in Austrasia, and he himself headed the army in the city of Metz, crossed the Ardennes, and arrived at Mainz to cross the Rhine. With him, a cortex of selected men from Neustria and Burgundy, led by their dukes and counts. The Saxons sent messengers to Dagobert, asking them to free them from the tax they had paid, and they swear to industriously and boldly block the way of the Wends and protect the section of the Frankish border. Dagobert, on the advice from lords of Neustria, agreed to these suggestions by the Saxons and the ambassadors swearing on their weapons, as is their custom, by name of the Saxon people. But their promise was not very important. However, Dagobert freed the Saxons, which they owed since the first Chlothar, to whom they gave 500 cows per year. The tax ended with Dagobert.”[Rakov 2019, Online resource]

The oath on a ring is mentioned in the poem *Hovamol*. There god Odin swears on his ring. It goes on that he did not keep the most sacred of all oaths, the one on his ring. From here it shows how important such an oath is. It is described as the most sacred, and even the head of the gods, Odin, is worried about the broken oath.

In poem *Lokasenna*, verse 12, Bragi⁵ says he is ready:

*„A horse and a sword from my hoard will I give,
And a ring gives Bragi to boot,*

4 Chronicle of Fredegar is a conventional title used for a French chronicle from the 7th century, probably written in Burgundy. The author is unknown. The book begins with the creation of the world and ends in 642 AD. There are also several references to events up to 658. Some copies of the manuscript contain a shorter version of the chronicle to 642 but include additional sections written at the Caroling Dynasty, which ends with the death of Pepin the Short in 768. Chronicle of Fredegar with its extensions is one of the few sources that provide information about the Merovingian dynasty for the period after 591 when Gregory of Tours finished his work *„Decem Libri Historiarum“*, also known as *„History of the Franks“*.

5 Bragi is a Scandinavian god of poets. He is the son of god Odin and goddess Frigg.

*That hatred thou makst not among the gods;
So rouse not the great ones to wrath.*“ [Bellows 1923, p. 156]

Here he speaks to god Loki. It is clear from these words of Bragie that some of the greatest values he would give from his treasure are a horse, a sword, and above all a ring. It is not clear from the text exactly what ring it is talking about, but it is obvious that this is the most valuable thing it can give.

For a ring-sword, we have comparatively later information, from the period after it was out of use, in the poem “*Helgikvida*” by the manuscript *Codex Regius*⁶. In the poem a sword is offered with a ring of Valkyrie of hero Helgi, who is described as the best of all:

“The Valkyrie speaks:

8. *“Swords I know lying in Sigarsholm,*

Fifty there are save only four;

One there is that is best of all,

The shield-destroyer, with gold it shines.

9. *“In the hilt is fame, in the haft is courage,*

In the point is fear, for its owner’s foes;

On the blade there lies a blood-flecked snake.

And a serpent’s tail round the flat is twisted.”

[Bellows 1923, p. 277; Du Chaillu 1889, p. 84]

The sword described possessing a ring and a snake blade on it, which is a metaphor for a special type of blades that have been questioned at first. With these characteristics, this sword is the most precious of all fifty that Valkyrie says are in the treasure. The data on the sword coincided with the history of the latest findings before the Viking period began.

Another example is from the poem “*Grípir’s prophecy*” or still known as “*First Lay of Sigurd Fáfnir’s Slayer*” (Gripisso). The translators changed the verse 41. Lines 3 and 4 are replaced by lines 3 and 4 of verse 23, they are completely identical. The original lines of verse 41 state:

⁶ The Codex Regius, also known as Poetic Edda or Old Edda, is a manuscript of a collection of northern poems that are different from Edda written by Snorri Sturluson. There are several versions, all of them mostly from texts from the Icelandic Medieval Manuscript - Codex Regius.

*“With thysword between, three nights thou sleepest;
With her thou winnest for Gunnar’s wife.”*

Here we read how Sigurd puts his sword between himself and Brunhilda. In the second row, it is reported that Sigurd had defeated her in a duel and she had to marry Gunnar [Bellows 1923, p. 351]. In the first two lines of the verse, there is also a passage skipped from the translators. After line one in the manuscript, the phrases “bright, ring-decked” referring to Sigourd’s Sword - Gram. Henry Bellows, in a comment on this, notes that this description is impossible, and many translators miss these phrases [Bellows 1923, p. 441]. I think it is here that we are talking about a ring-sword here. The period in which the poem is placed in the end of the 5th century when there already exist. Although Codex Regius is supposed to be written in the 12th century, it is based on older sages and poems. From here comes the inability of translators to understand the meaning of the second word that describes the sword.

The similar is the situation in the Beowulf poem, where the word *hringmæl*, which translates differently in different translations. Historians, however, translate it literally with a “ring-sword” or “ring-ornament,” having in mind a ring-sword. In the part where a ring is mentioned, it says:

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*“Think how the Heathobards⁷ will be bound to feel,
their lord, Ingeld, and his loyal thanes⁸,
when he walks in with that woman to the feast:
Danes are at the table, being entertained,
honoured guests in glittering regalia,
burnished ring-mail that was their hosts’ birthright,
looted when the Heathobards could no longer wield
their weapons in the shield-clash, when they went down
with their beloved comrades and forfeited their lives.”* [Heaney 1999, p. 291].

7 Heathobards or Heaðobards (Old English: Heaðubeardan, Old Lower Saxon: Headubarden) are probably a branch of the Longobards, and their name may have been preserved in toponym - Bardengau in Lower Saxony, Germany.

8 Thane (in Anglo-Saxon England) a man who held land granted by the king or by a military nobleman, ranking between an ordinary freeman and a hereditary noble. (Oxford dictionaries)

From the translation, it became clear that the “*honoured guests*” who had fun had very old swords with riveted rings on their handles and they were described as a treasure. This is because the handles were probably made of precious metal. Old swords are highly valued in sagas and poems because of their good quality of craftsmanship, often having magical abilities and personal character.

In Old Edda and the sources, we also find many cases of reuse of swords dug out from the graves and then used not only by one generation but by a few. This information helps us understand a few things about why some discovered swords have traces of a ring, but it himself is not present in the tombstones, or why we find the traces on the ring of his repeated use. We find such a case in Paul Deacon’s in “History of the Langobards”, which reads:

Chapter 2:28. “*Nowadays, Giselpert, duke of Verona, opened his tomb [of Albion] and took out his sword and some other decorations found there.*”
[Gagova 2011, p. 61]

Later after Christianization, it was the case of Emperor Otto III (980-1002), who in 1000 opened the tomb of Charlemagne (747-814) and took relics of it.⁹

A few centuries after rings on swords were no longer used, we find some examples of how rituals and the symbolic load of the ring and the sword have been preserved to some extent. The sword and the ring we find in the wedding ritual from the end of the Early Middle Ages in the poem *Ruodlieb* written about 1030 probably from a German monk. It describes how the wedding ring is handed to the bride on the sword handle. According to H. Meyer¹⁰, this is a threat that warns her that death will be a punishment for infidelity, but Meyer shows that this is unlikely to be of all importance. He believes that this opposition to the sword and ring accentuate the sovereignty of the husband and wife agreement and the binding nature of the oath that they accept together so that the sword is not only a threat to the woman but to both criminals [Ellis-Davidson 1960, p. 1]. The poem shows how some traditions and rituals related to the sword and the ring were

⁹ It is assumed that it is then removed and the sword of Charlemagne, *Joyeuse*. It was mentioned only in 1245 when it was used in the coronation of the French King Philip III (1245-1285), and this tradition continued to Charles X (1824-1830). Today it is in the Louvre. See: H. Meyer. *Die Eheschliessung im „Ruodlieb“ und das Eheschwert*. Zeitschrift d. Savigny-Stiftungf. Rechtsgeschichte (Germ., Abt.) 52, 1932.

¹⁰ See: H. Meyer. *Die Eheschliessung im „Ruodlieb“ und das Eheschwert*. Zeitschrift d. Savigny-Stiftungf. Rechtsgeschichte (Germ. Abt.) 52, 1932.

preserved in the 11th century, which reflections can be found in the period 5th – 7th century.

Conclusion

The interdisciplinary method of analysis of the ring-swords that I use in the article helps to achieve more depth cogitations and conclusions on the subject. The analysis of the archaeological finds, backed up by the few written sources, gives an interesting picture of the significance, purpose and symbolism of ring-swords.

Written sources and sags contribute to the interpretation of the symbolism of the rings. As already mentioned, the circle, the ring, and the arm-ring bear a highly symbolic meaning in the beliefs of the German tribes, and most probably the rings on swords carries a similar symbolism. The arm-ring and bracelet are spread not only among the aristocracy but also among the warriors and the ordinary population. It is a symbol of the relationship between the master and his follower. Most likely, the ring-sword has the same meaning, but in this case, it was reserved only for one part of the aristocratic elite. The ring was a symbol of loyalty, oaths were taken on it by its owner. The oaths that have been taken are of the highest honor, not of idleness, because it is believed that if a sworn oath or ring is broken, it will lead to the perdition of the perpetrator, and even the sword can surrender you in the battle.

The written sources provide us with various information about the ring-sword and the use of them in the rituals of the Early Medieval German peoples. Swords were a personal weapon of the aristocracy and rarely found in ordinary warriors. This has happened in extremely rare situations where the warrior, for his courage or another merit, was given the privilege of carrying such a weapon. From here we can conclude that rituals related to swords during the period were part of the nobles' lives. From Fredegar Chronicle, we see the Saxons have sent a diplomatic mission to King Dagobert and they swear an oath on their weapons, which, as the aristocratic elite has shown, is a privilege. This shows that no one has been sent to such important missions. These traditions can be found later in the Middle Ages in the knights' dedication and the establishment of knightly virtues. From the sagas, we get information on the subject. Several previously unpublished sang texts related to the ring-swords are presented, from which useful information about the meaning of not only the rings but also of the sword itself is extracted.

The problem is that philologists have difficulty in translating certain terms from the sagas associated with the individual parts of the sword, and it is, therefore, a bad practice to omit sentences or to replace with the other part of the text. What sagas give us is really priceless information, and after a more depth study, they are likely to give more detail.

The ring-swords appear in the pagan period of the various peoples. The oldest examples from Norway and England date back to the first half of the 5th century, but as it became clear, they are of Frankish origin of the blades. On the continent, the oldest ring is from the middle of the 5th century in the Aleman tomb. When adopting Christianity, the use of the riveting ring does not stop to be used immediately. In Franks and Alemans, the most commonly used types of rings are type 1a and 1b, less often than type 2a, which ranges from the mid-5th to the late 6th century. The expansion of the kingdom by King Clovis I and his heirs presented at Fig. 7 shows a map of graves with ring-swords that clearly follow the way of spreading the territorial extension of the Frankish Kingdom. This shows how the King gave his subordinate ring, and placed him in a leading position in the region. By the end of the sixth century, however, the use of rings reduced and disappeared due to the strengthening of the power of the aristocrats in their areas and the reduction of the king's influence on them. It is also possible that religion has influenced the weakening of this pagan custom. The Alemans also stopped the use of rings towards the end of the 6th century, but it is not certain whether the cause is rooted in the acceptance of the Christian faith.

In Britain, the use of rings does not stop after the adoption of Christianity by the newcomers' Angles and Saxons who also import this use of ring-swords. They are mainly used in the southern parts of the island, the kingdoms of Essex, Wessex, Sussex, Kent and East England are found, and later appear in Mercy. Most rings are found in Kent and White Island, which are the southern parts of the island, and this may be due to close contact with the Franks on the other side of the Channel where the use of the rings is also strong. On the Scandinavian Peninsula, it cannot be said that Christianity had any influence on the role of the ribbed rings because their Christianization was much later, the Danes in the 10th century, and a little later the Swedes and the Norwegians.

At the end of the period of use of ring-swords, a change in the use of the ring is also observed. It appears not only on the sword handles, but also on a drink-

ing horn and a shield, and the use of two rather than a single ring on the sword handle shows a change in its meaning compared to the centuries before. He has a more ornamental role than, as in the previous centuries, to show the connection between the lord and his follower.

As we can see, the ring-swords exist from the barbaric times which is visible from mythology and are supposed to have disappeared with the adoption of Christianity, but that did not happen. The meaning and symbolism of the ring are in worship among the barbaric and Christian aristocracy in the 5th-7th centuries, but also after the adoption of Christianity, as evidenced by the period of its use. And it is interesting that the symbolic meaning is not changed by the new faith. We even witness something very interesting. Christianity accepts some rituals related to the oath on the ring and the sword and keeps them until the English Revolution, and the role of the sword in rituals and ceremonies remains to our day. The role of the ring-swords remains as a faded reflection from the pagan period in later rituals.

Application 1

	location		location
1	Brighstone, Isle of Wight, United Kingdom	35,36	Nocera Umbra, Provincia di Perugia, Repubblica Italiana
2	Isle of Wight, United Kingdom	37,38, 39	Valsgärde, Sweden
3	Barham, Kent, United Kingdom	40	Vendel, Sweden
4	Isle of Wight, United Kingdom	41	Bergamo, Provincia di Lombardia, Repubblica Italiana
5	Isle of Wight, United Kingdom	42	Castel Trosino, Ascoli Piceno, Repubblica Italiana
6	Isle of Wight, United Kingdom	43	Stånga, island Gottland, Sweden
7	Isle of Wight, United Kingdom	44	Grötlingbo, island Gottland, Sweden
8 – 10	Staffordshire, West Midlands, United Kingdom	45	Halla, island Gottland, Sweden
11	Lissington, Lincolnshire, United Kingdom	46	Vallstena, island Gottland, Sweden

12,13	Saint-Dizier, Marne, France	47	Hammarby, Uppland, Sweden
14	Isle of Wight, United Kingdom	48	Karleby, Västergötland, Sweden
15	Lissington, Lincolnshire, United Kingdom	49	Beckum, Germany
16	Lissington, Lincolnshire, United Kingdom	50	Schretzheim, Germany
17	Isle of Wight, United Kingdom	51	Heberg, Halland, Sweden
18	Coombe, Kent, United Kingdom	52	Snösbäck, Västergötland, Sweden
19	Grenay, Pas-de-Calais, France	53	Krefeld, Germany
20	Kastel in the region of Mainz, Germany	54	Staffordshire, West Midlands, United Kingdom
21	Charleville-Mézières, France	55	Orsoy, Germany
22	Villers-Semeuse, France	56	Väsby, Sweden
23	Chaouilley, France	57	Sutton Hoo, Woodbridge, Suffolk, United Kingdom
24	Faversham, Kent, United Kingdom	58	Kalmumäki, Uusikaupunki, Finland
25	Gilton, Kent, United Kingdom	59	The sandy hill Pappilanmäki, Eura, Finland
26	Sarre, Kent, United Kingdom	60	Kaarina, Egentliga, Finland
27	Finglesham, Kent, United Kingdom	61	Glafs fjorden, Värmland, Sweden
28	Dover, Kent, United Kingdom	62	Sturkö, Blekinge, Sweden
29,30	Bifrons, Kent, United Kingdom	63	Kville, Bohuslän, Sweden
31	Finglesham, Kent, United Kingdom	64, 65	Endre, island Gottland, Sweden
32	Shorwell, Isle of Wight, United Kingdom	66	Schonen, Sweden
33	Fursenberg, southern Saxony, Germany	67	Kalvola, Tavastland, Finland
34	Isle of Wight, United Kingdom	68,69	Rebala, Estonia
		70	Nydam Mose, Øster Sottrup, Denmark

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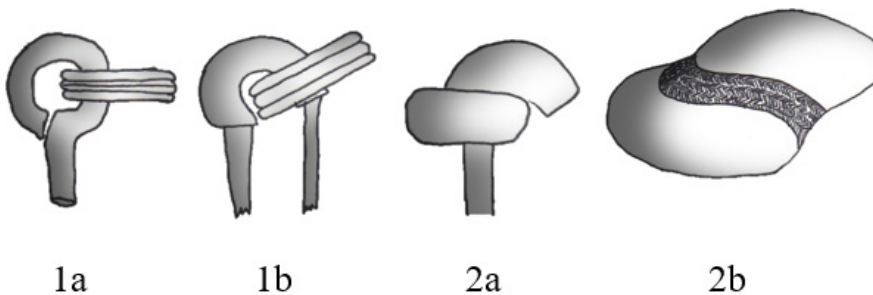


Fig. 1 The four types of rings - Oakeshott, E. *Sword in hand. A brief survey of the knightly sword*. Arms & Armor Inc., 2000, p. 23



Fig. 2 Applications with helmet engravings found in Toroslunda (a) and Vendel (b), Sweden. Application from the sword scabbard from Sigmaringen, Germany (c). Ring from shield found in Sutton Hu, England (d). Horn of drinking with a ring on it. Valsgarde, Sweden (e). [Online resource]. www.pinterest.com



Fig. 3. Hilt of the Snartemo sword. Johnsen, Eirik Irgens; Kulturhistorisk museum/
Museum of Cultural History (postmottak@khm.uio.no). CC BY-SA 4.0 (wikimedia
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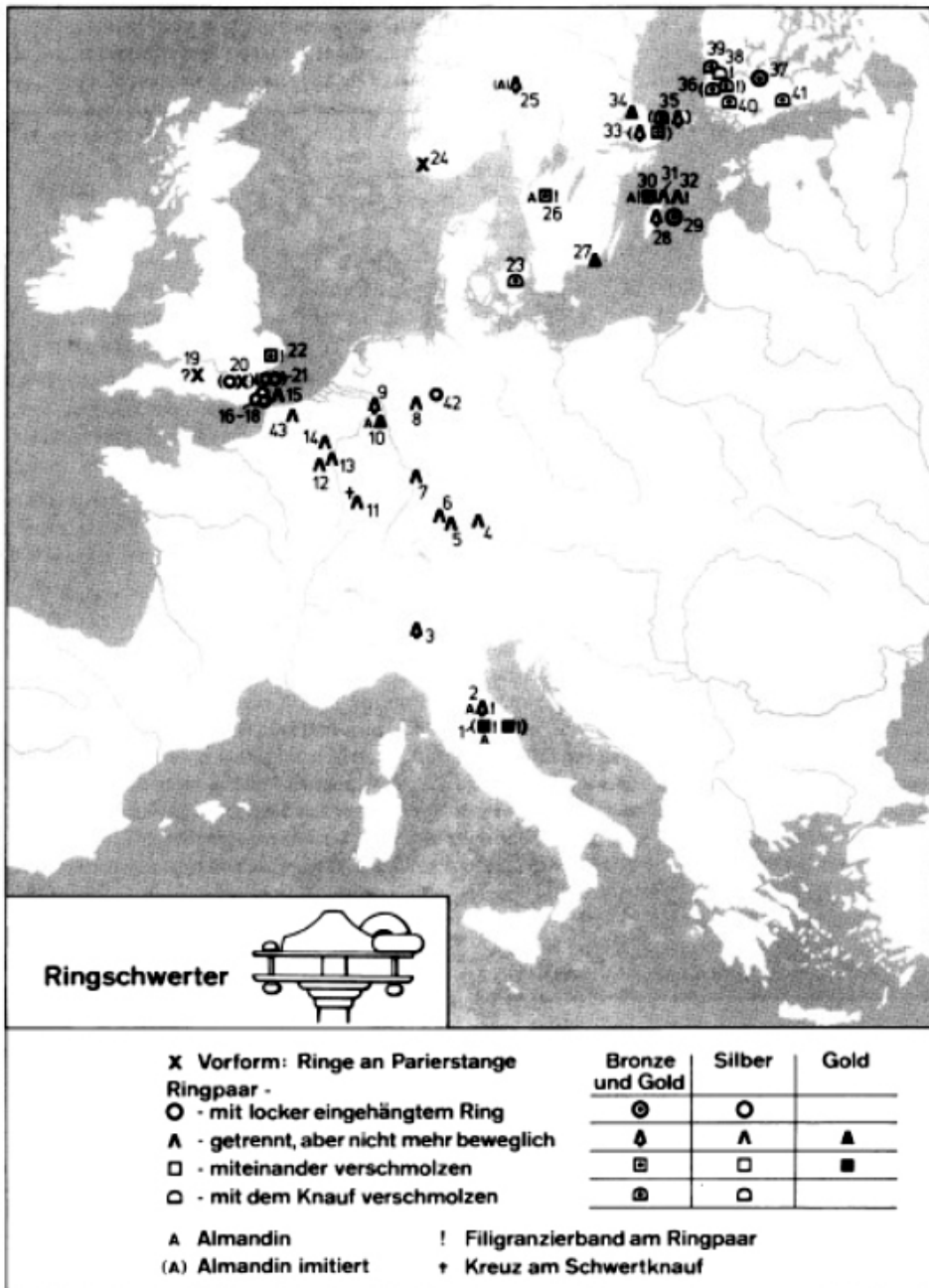


Fig. 4 Map from Übersicht, E. Helm und Rangabzeichen germanischer Krieger Map of rings-swords - Overview, E. Helm und Ringschwert Prunkbewaffnung und Rangabzeichen germanischer Krieger. *Studien zur Sachsenforschung* 6, 1987, p. 209

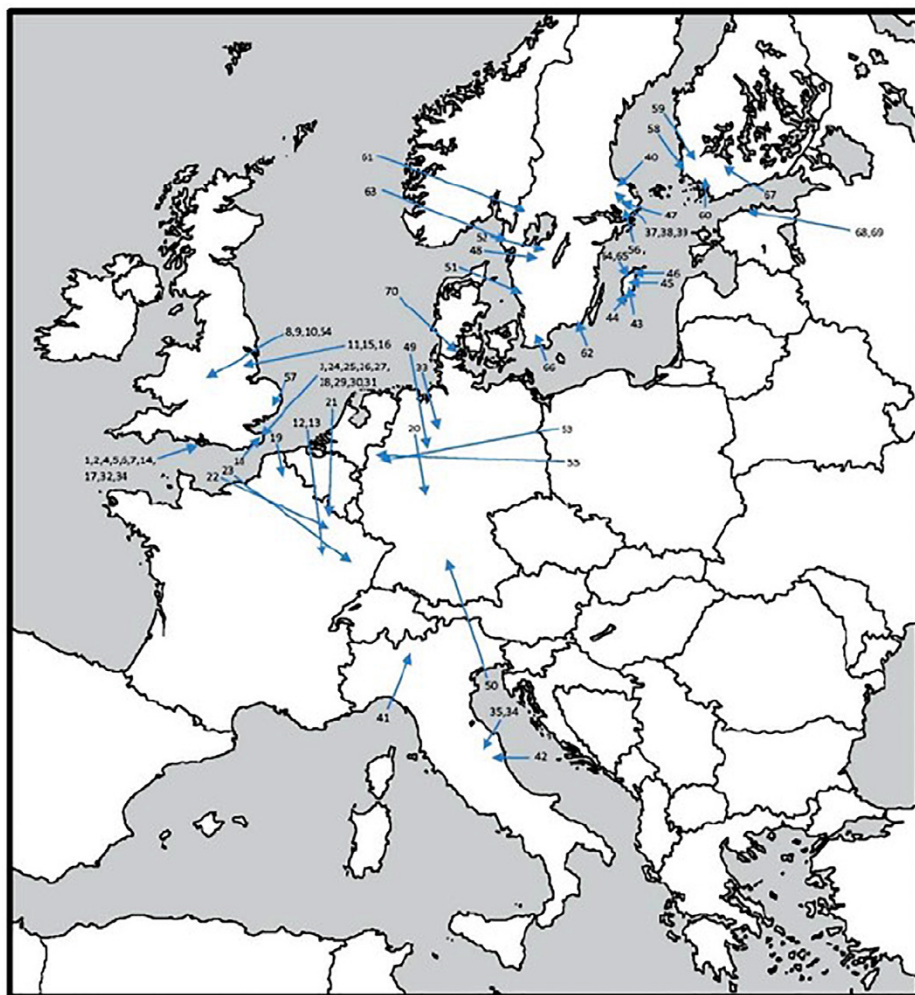


Fig. 5 Map of Europe with the spreading of ring-swords. Author Vladimir T. Vasilev

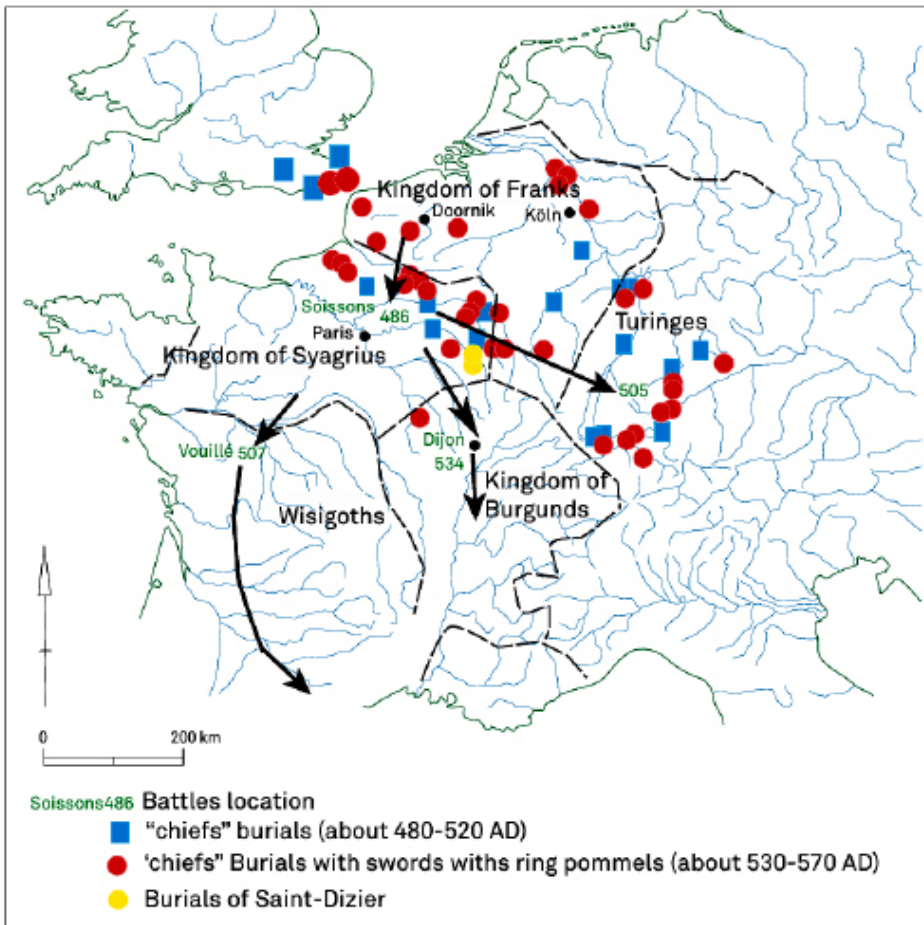


Fig. 6 Map of the distribution of rings-swords in the Frankish kingdom. Truc, M. Probable Frankish burials of the sixth century AD at Saint-Dizier (Haute-Marne, Champagne-Ardenne, France). ACE Conference Brussels: The very beginning of Europe? Early-Medieval Migration and Colonization, 2012, p. 60.



Altorelievo su pannello di alabastro, Spagna, XIII secolo, Metropolitan Museum, Fondo Dodge 1913. Public Domain.

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