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according to Bartosz Kontny

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# Diskussionen

## Waging war. Goths and Vandals and northern barbarians – the dogs of war according to Bartosz Kontny

Rasmus Birch Iversen

### Introduction

The following lines were originally written as a book review of “The Archaeology of War” by Warsaw University professor Bartosz Kontny<sup>1</sup>. This is still mainly the case, however, since much of the controversy in the original review had the character of fundamental disagreements concerning the interpretation of archaeology and the use of Latin sources, the editors of the journal “Germania” have been kind enough to offer more space to elaborate on the given critique. At this point, it is essential to note that I have recently published a book on almost the same subject as the book under review<sup>2</sup>. The contents of this book include a critique of some of B. Kontny’s earlier works, which comprise a large part also of his book “The Archaeology of War”<sup>3</sup>.

Before venturing any further into the announced dissent, the reader might benefit from a short introduction to Kontny’s book. “The Archaeology of War” is not a monograph per se but rather a compilation of five articles that were first published in Polish in 2019; yet the content is revised and updated and the layout improved. In the one-page introduction, the author further informs us that his intention was to write in a commonly accessible language while maintaining an objective approach to science.

Theoretically, Kontny belongs to the diffusionist school. He applies a centre-periphery approach in which advanced communities influence or even dominate weaker ones within relatively closed cultural zones. In Kontny’s world, the Przeworsk culture of central and southern Poland dominated its surroundings to a point where it even played a leading role in Scandinavian politics. In that sense, Kontny’s project appears to be a nationalist one; an attempt to bring Poland to the fore of Roman and Migration Period Europe. He achieves this by identifying the archaeological cultures of Roman and Migration Period Poland with the historical Goths and Vandals, who contributed significantly to the fall of the Western Roman Empire, or the transformation of the Roman world, if one prefers a softer and more modern interpretation of the events up to and after AD 476<sup>4</sup>.

### On bog finds with weapons

Chapter 1 bears the title: “Sacrificial Lake Deposits as Sources for Learning about Military Affairs and War Rituals in Barbarian Europe during the Roman and Migration Periods” (p. 13–34) and

<sup>1</sup> B. KONTNY, *The Archaeology of War. Studies on Weapons of Barbarian Europe in the Roman and Migration Period*. Warsaw Stud. Arch. 1. Brepols Publishers n. v. (Turnhout 2023). € 115. ISBN 978-2-503-60737-5; e-ISBN 978-2-503-60738-2. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1484/M.WSA-EB.5.134697>. 264 pages with 139 figures. Water-colour drawings by Stanisław Kontny.

<sup>2</sup> IVERSEN 2025.

<sup>3</sup> KONTNY 2002; 2005; 2007; 2008a; 2008b; 2019. The aim of the book is an analysis of different approaches to the study of military organisation and fighting techniques.

<sup>4</sup> HALSALL 2007; WOOD 2018.

contains a didactic and unbalanced characterisation of Scandinavian bog sites with weapons – often, though not by Kontny, referred to as army equipment sacrifices – and a few examples from Northern Poland (Lubanowo, Czaszkowo and Wólka), which the author believes to belong to the same tradition. Didactic, because the aim of Kontny’s paper is to lecture the reader about the Scandinavian bog finds. Unbalanced, because he quickly loses sight of this aim through several deviations and by insisting on spotlighting the Polish finds. Obviously, these are bog finds with weapons, but our current knowledge does not offer the same opportunities for inference as the larger, better excavated and published finds of army equipment, mainly in Jutland and Funen, Denmark, as well as in Schleswig, Germany<sup>5</sup>.

After one page introducing the chronology of the Iron Age, the next four and a half pages contain a listing of weapon sacrifices in Europe which are believed to be “the roots” of the Scandinavian bog finds, a detour around descriptions of weapon dancing in Tacitus and references to other types of bog deposits from the Stone and Bronze Ages. These pages demonstrate the author’s far-reaching knowledge, which he does not, however, use in an analytical way.

In this regard, it is interesting that the Scandinavian finds of human sacrifices, the so-called bog bodies, are not mentioned. Phenomenally, they are closely related to the find from Alken Enge, East Jutland (Denmark), which only contains few weapons, but skeletal parts of at least 82 male individuals and possibly several hundred, of which many bear combat inflictions<sup>6</sup>. The find most likely represents the sacrifice of an army without most of its equipment and is dated just after the turn of our time. The find is described by Kontny as a “recent discovery”. In fact, excavations were carried out in the 1950s by Harald Andersen, who published several small updates in the popular Danish periodical SKALK<sup>7</sup>. One of only two sources given by Kontny is the anthology from 2019<sup>8</sup>. Although written in Danish, the anthology has abstracts and captions in English. These contain the information that Alken Enge and Vædebro, Denmark, which is mentioned several times in the following chapters because of its well-preserved wooden shield, in fact is one and the same site. They also show that Kontny is incorrect in stating that Alken Enge contained several wooden clubs; rather it contains a few wooden objects that might be associated with clubs<sup>9</sup>. With reference to the abstract, he probably would not have concluded that these clubs were used to execute prisoners of war. Additionally, he should have referred to the information that histology including bacterial processes has been more decisive than the exposure to carnivores for the assessment of the duration of time in which bodies would have lain on the battlefield before they were removed to the site of sacrifice<sup>10</sup>. A summary of the Alken Enge find has also been published in English, but this does not appear in Kontny’s list of sources<sup>11</sup>.

Given the title of the chapter, it surprises that Kontny keeps his discussion of the Scandinavian army equipment finds rather short. The opinion he seems to hold and which is mentioned repeatedly in the following chapters is that well organised armies were only a Scandinavian phenomenon in the Roman period (pp. 65, 70, 167, 171, 207). I will return to that discussion later.

<sup>5</sup> See IVERSEN 2010a, 142–144 for an attempt at a classification of weapon sacrifices. A similar attempt can be found in NØRGÅRD JØRGENSEN / ANDERSEN 2014, 249–250. None of them are mentioned by Kontny. In IVERSEN 2010a only the Wólka find was known to the author (see RADDATZ 1993).

<sup>6</sup> HOLST et al. 2018; LØVSCHAL et al. 2019a-b; MOLLERUP 2019; MØRK 2019; LØVSCHAL et al. 2020.

<sup>7</sup> ANDERSEN 1957a; 1957b; 1959.

<sup>8</sup> LØVSCHAL et al. 2019a. The other source is the short gazetteer HOLST et al. 2018.

<sup>9</sup> IVERSEN 2019, 96–97.

<sup>10</sup> TJELLDÉN 2019, 185–192.

<sup>11</sup> LØVSCHAL et al. 2020.

Another misunderstanding can be found in the description of the bog finds. Kontny claims that meticulous typological studies influenced the decision against Herbert Jankuhn's theory of repeated small offerings and for Johannes Brøndsted's few large-scale offerings in an ongoing discussion of the interpretation of the bog finds<sup>12</sup>. However, typology would not have been able to solve this question. It was the refitting of ritually broken artefacts scattered in the individual heaps of equipment that determined the matter. In this way it was proven that the many heaps or weapon bundles in Illerup Ådal, Denmark, belonged to only one ritual incident<sup>13</sup>.

The remainder of the chapter is spent on discussions of animal symbolism on weapons and other artefacts leading to the conclusion of the existence of an Odin cult as far back as the 2<sup>nd</sup> second century AD. This opinion is not quite new, but it is presented here without any reservations and very few quotations. Much seems to be inspired by Peter Vang Petersen<sup>14</sup>, but he is not sufficiently quoted. The chapter on "Sacrificial Lake Deposits" was obviously written as an introduction for a Polish audience, but as a gazetteer in an international forum it lacks in depth.

### On weaponry in the Przeworsk, Wielbark, and Baltic cultures

Chapters 2–4 follow a very similar structure. The chapters address weapons in three different areas of Poland: The Przeworsk culture in central and southern Poland (chapter 2: "Przeworsk Culture Warriors in the Roman and Early Migration Periods", pp. 35–74), the Wielbark culture in northern and eastern Poland (chapter 3: "Weaponry in the Wielbark Culture", pp. 75–117) and the Baltic areas of north-eastern Poland (chapter 4: "Balt Weaponry from the Roman and Migration Periods in the Territory of Poland", pp. 118–188).

The Przeworsk culture is almost solely defined by its weapon burials, and the material culture is in that regard much richer than in the Wielbark and east Baltic cultures. However, compared to the two following and more structured chapters, Kontny has difficulties sticking to the subject in chapter 2. The content draws from a wide field, offering examples from Indo-European myths to Viking sagas in the shape of magical swords made by "mythical smiths" including the Excalibur myth and Icelandic sagas, and evil eyes or Odin-motives on the sockets of spearheads. But why evil eyes on a spearhead? And why Odin, when each spearhead has two eyes? The oval or rhombic incisions around the rivet holes on spearhead sockets are also well known in the 5<sup>th</sup> century bog deposits in Nydam, Denmark. Here, P. Vang Petersen sees them in connection with the entrelac-ornamented spear shafts and interprets this combination as a "serpentinization" of the spearheads<sup>15</sup>. The addition of zoomorphic attributes to these weapons seems to be a more likely hypothesis. However, Vang Petersen's idea has not been incorporated into Kontny's book. The theory that certain cracks in some spearhead sockets could be interpreted as holders for pennons or the like is intriguing, but fails to answer the question why such pennons would not just have been attached with nails to a wooden stake below the iron head.

Kontny considers Roman swords with inscriptions as objects gained from plunder "as it is hard to assume that the Romans would freely give away their private high-quality weapons" (p. 58). According to Kontny, however, only swords with figural incrustations are objects of trade. It is sug-

<sup>12</sup> ILKJÆR/LØNSTRUP 1982, 95.

<sup>13</sup> ILKJÆR/LØNSTRUP 1983; ØRSNES 1988, 20–21; ILKJÆR 1990, 24–26; 2002, 29–32; 2003, 48–50.

<sup>14</sup> VANG PETERSEN 2003; 2020c, 263–66; 2020d, 298–301. See STEINACHER 2023, 298 with refer-

ences to the misguided assumption of a common "Germanic mythology" with deep historical roots and an alleged "continuity ranging from the iconography of the Bronze Age to mythical motifs of the medieval Edda".

<sup>15</sup> VANG PETERSEN 2020d, 298–301.



gested that economic progress enabled the Przeworsk-culture to possess more swords of this kind compared to any other part of the barbarian world (p. 59). The reason for the distinction between these two types of ornamentation is not explained. Furthermore, the author states that the military material culture of the Przeworsk culture dominated central Europe during the Early Roman Period, however “in the later period the Scandinavian weaponry canon was more popular. This can be explained by, among other factors, the high level of organisation of north European troops that was certainly impressive for warriors from other parts of barbarian Europe” (pp. 70–71).

Kontny is convinced that warriors from the Przeworsk culture and the area of the southern Baltic participated in great numbers in the combats that led to some of the large military equipment sacrifices in Scandinavia, especially in Vimose, Denmark. The reason for this conclusion is illustrated in fig. 4.53 (p. 186) by a few weapons from Vimose on Funen, none of which are exclusively “Polish”. More convincing is the fork tongue belt buckle, which is commonly found in “Polish” graves in the late-2<sup>nd</sup> and early-3<sup>rd</sup> centuries. Kontny could also have added strap-ends of Raddatz’ type J II,2 and J IV,1 to strengthen his case. However, there is a “Polish” belt set for one warrior in Vimose and two in Thorsberg, Germany. Given their importance in contemporary graves in Poland, the basis for Kontny’s conclusions remains weak. I will return to this discussion.

Like many other Polish archaeologists, Kontny identifies the Przeworsk culture with the Vandals of Roman ethnography. This identification is highly problematic in my opinion. However, this equation allows Kontny to explain the end of the Przeworsk culture in a simple manner: the Vandals all abandoned today’s Poland and crossed the Rhine in AD 406 to end up in Spain a few years later. Kontny’s reasoning is circular (p. 73): “This expedition must have been of extraordinary scope and have involved an extremely high number of Barbarians, as the decline of the Przeworsk Culture settlement is dated to this period.” Paradoxically, the chapter dealing with the Przeworsk culture is the shortest of the three chapters on regional weapon culture, even though central and southern Poland are far richer on weapon burials than the north (chapter 3) and northeast (chapter 4). The detail put into the discussions in these two chapters, is not possible in the chapter on the Przeworsk culture. In conclusion, Kontny has written more convincing papers on the weapons of the Przeworsk culture compared to the evaluation in chapter 2 of “The Archaeology of War”<sup>16</sup>.

Just as the Przeworsk culture is associated with the Vandals so is the Wielbark culture in Pomerania associated with the Goths. We know this from Jordanes who describes the history of the Goths in his *De origine actibusque Getarum* (mid-6<sup>th</sup> century AD) and their origin in and exodus from *Scandza*, which is usually identified with Scandinavia or present-day Scania. However, Kontny follows Wołagiewicz’ identification of *Scandza* as the Kaszuby and Krajenskie “Lake District” in Pomerania<sup>17</sup>. Kontny’s work falls short in explaining how such a small area could have housed a multitude of *nationes* (the *vagina nationum*) including the *Suetidi* and the *Dani* in the 6<sup>th</sup> century. According to legend, the Goths arrived on three ships. According to Kontny this is “obviously symbolic”, and moreover “it seems to suggest that their migration was military in nature” (p. 76). How can it be both?

The Wielbark culture is not characterised by weapons like the Przeworsk culture. Kontny remarks: “There is a stark contrast between the military history of warlike Gothic peoples and an almost total absence of weaponry in archaeological sources which are believed to have been settled by Gothic cultures”. To be able to describe the weapons of the Wielbark culture Kontny is forced

<sup>16</sup> See KONTNY 2002; 2005; 2008a for a more methodological, statistical approach to the weapon graves of the Przeworsk culture.

<sup>17</sup> WOŁAGIEWICZ 1993.

to refer to questionable sources, such as stray finds as well as drawings and descriptions stemming from the collections that were tragically lost during World War II. Over the years I have witnessed several conference presentations based on these archives of lost finds. I have always found the approach futile. In Kontny's presentation this questionable approach is demonstrated by illustrations of fragments or sketches of weapons with dubious classifications<sup>18</sup>. Ten lines are spent discussing a 32 cm long iron tip (spear or javelin) that has never been drawn or photographed ending with the conclusion (p. 82): "These, however, are merely suppositions, as the shape of this weapon is unknown". In the discussion of an assumed Roman gladius which turned out to be a 19<sup>th</sup> century artillery sword Kontny proves my point: how dangerous the absence of context is in archaeology.

As the number of weapons found within the compounds of the Wielbark culture is very low, the basis for general assumptions is limited. Nevertheless, based on very few axes, Kontny concludes that it is "justified to assume [that axes were] national weapons of the Wielbark culture" (p. 105). Later, he concludes that the military equipment of the Wielbark culture was based on a model inspired from the Przeworsk culture in the Early Roman period, however, with axes in a "prominent role" influenced by the West Baltic "circle" (p. 114). In the Late Roman period the material culture/weaponry was increasingly inspired by Scandinavia. This is seen in the mentioned, but ill-classified spear and javelin heads, the introduction of D-shaped and omega-shaped belt buckles and rosette fibulas and iron combs as far south as the Black Sea area. However, Marzena Przybyła has convincingly demonstrated a variety of regional types within rosette fibulas in which there is no or almost no overlap between the "Gothic" areas and Scandinavia<sup>19</sup>. Much the same can be said for iron combs.

Chapter 4 concentrates on the weapons of various Baltic cultural groups limited to the confines of the present Polish border. Evaluating the material culture, one faces similar weaknesses as with the Wielbark culture: stray finds, lost collections and sketchy archives. The only exception are weapon graves at different times in different areas which appear in varying numbers. A javelin from a bog find in Czastkowo, Poland, is probably correctly identified as a Scandinavian/Norwegian type Veum from the late 5<sup>th</sup> century AD. The Scandinavian spearhead of a 3<sup>rd</sup> century type Vennolum from Sz wajcaria, (Poland) is also well known. Additionally, Kontny presents a javelin of type Skuttunge from the late-3<sup>rd</sup> or early-4<sup>th</sup> century and a type Sättra from the late-4<sup>th</sup> fourth century. In comparison, a spearhead classified as a late-4<sup>th</sup> century type Mollestad does not live up to the criteria. It does not have the pinched (German "einziehend") blade outline which is a main characteristic for this type of spearhead and the socket is longer than 5 cm, which is another. A javelin with one barb from a 3<sup>rd</sup> century grave in Netta (Poland) is classified as a type 23/Sæli. Unfortunately, this type does not exist. In Jørgen Ilkjær's typology, type 20 Sæli is a javelin with one barb and a collar on the socket. According to the same typology, the spear from Netta is type 23 Lanzentyp<sup>20</sup>. It does not have to be of Scandinavian origin, since it may just be a re-worked spearhead. A spearhead from

<sup>18</sup> Two fragments of spearheads from Żarnowiec (p. 78 fig. 3,2.3–4) are classified as Piotr KACZANOWSKI's (1995) type II1 and I1. Sketches of spearheads (p. 79 fig. 3,3,1.5.6) are classified as type XV; I4 or III1; I or II and II, respectively. I cannot agree with the identification of a spearhead and a javelin head as Scandinavian types Dörby and Skuttunge (p. 81 fig. 3,5,1–2), following the typologies of Jørgen ILKJÆR (1990) and Jan BEMMANN and Güde HAHNE (1994). The spearhead blade does not possess the re-

quired concave-rhombic cross section, and the socket on the javelin is too long compared to the length of the tip. On the other hand, a javelin from Piłac, Poland (p. 79 fig. 3,3.8), classified as a Kaczanowski type A, may in fact be Scandinavian and dated to the late 5<sup>th</sup> century.

<sup>19</sup> HANSEN/PRZYBYŁA 2010; PRZYBYŁA 2018, 29–144. As for combs: my studies on Danish iron combs remains to be published.

<sup>20</sup> ILKJÆR 1990, 165; 170–182.

Tumiany (Poland), grave 120, has no parallels in the typologies of either Anne Nørgård Jørgensen nor Vytautas Kazakevičius<sup>21</sup>. Instead, Kontny suggests that it is a late-2<sup>nd</sup> century spearhead of Kaczanowski's type XV. There is, however, a reason why Kontny did not find parallels of this spearhead. V. Kazakevičius covers the timespan between the second and the 8<sup>th</sup> century and A. Nørgård Jørgensen the 6<sup>th</sup> to the 9<sup>th</sup> century. The Tumiany spearhead is a 10<sup>th</sup> century Scandinavian spearhead of Jan Petersen's type K<sup>22</sup>.

In his description and rejection of battle knives as a phenomenon, Kontny does not refer to the two-knife system from Illerup Ådal (p. 143). Here, J. Ilkjær has demonstrated that each warrior wore two belts, a personal belt with a small knife worn under the tunic and a military belt with a larger knife worn on the outside of the tunic<sup>23</sup>. The Baltic knives in question are usually 24–40 cm long, less often only 15–20 cm long, and sometimes only 12 cm, which Kontny describes as a “bizarre” length for a battle knife, and knives longer than 30 cm are very rare. However, in Illerup Ådal, type 1-(battle) knives have average blade lengths of 13,4 cm and in total they are usually longer than 20 cm but rarely longer than 30 cm's. The common knives have average blade lengths of 8,4 cm<sup>24</sup>. Kontny further ironizes over the concepts “combat awls”, and strike-a-lights, razors and scissors as weapons (p. 144). Evidently, battle knives such as these were not considered the primary choice in combat. Nevertheless, the find circumstances in Illerup Ådal clearly show that these knives were meant as weapons, either for the killing of an enemy or as a substitute for other weapons, such as the javelin, the spear, the sword, when these had been used or lost.

Accordingly, the unique Roman *pugio* from Illischken (Kaliningrad, Russia) is not a weapon either. The reason for this is its metal handle, which does not absorb sweat, making it impractical as a weapon in combat. Following this reasoning, several high-end swords from Scandinavian bog finds would not be weapons either. From the 3<sup>rd</sup> century onwards, officer's swords often had a metal grip. Early swords are known from Illerup Ådal, Vimose and Thorsberg. Later swords with silver coated handles are known from the turn to the 4<sup>th</sup> century and were found in Thorsberg, Germany and Kragehul, Ejsbøl and Nydam (Denmark) and cast bronze handles from the late-4<sup>th</sup> century were discovered in Nydam, Kragehul and Ejsbøl<sup>25</sup>. These luxury sword handles were fitted onto sword blades of Roman origin just like numerous swords with handles of organic material and must be considered weapons, despite the inconvenience of insufficient sweat absorption. The well-known gold-grip *spathae* from the late-5<sup>th</sup> century may have served mainly as ceremonial weapons, but even so, they were still weapons<sup>26</sup>.

Axes are discussed with a convincing typology under the headline “blunt weapons” (pp. 147–152), which they obviously are not, whereas clubs are discussed at length under the headline “Swords” (p. 134). Some Hun-type trilobate arrowheads in Lithuanian strongholds and similar arrowheads found “embedded in skeletons of the dead” (p. 166) are discussed under the headline “Bows and arrows”, which are not generally considered to be weapons throughout the book. In contrast, Kontny denies the presence of Hun armies in Lithuania, thus choosing to disregard the famous quote from the Roman emissary Priscus that the Hun empire stretched all the way to the ocean, i. e. the Baltic Sea. It is also the opinion of the author of this text that this is highly unlikely.

<sup>21</sup> KONTNY 2023, 180 fig. 4,47,1. – KAZAKEVIČIUS 1988; NØRGÅRD JØRGENSEN 1999.

<sup>22</sup> PETERSEN 1919; PEDERSEN 2014, 94. – The type can be found in NØRGÅRD JØRGENSEN (1999, 153 fig. 125) in her reproduction of A. Pedersen's Viking Age weapon chronology.

<sup>23</sup> ILKJÆR 1993, 257–263; 2002, 52–58.

<sup>24</sup> ILKJÆR 2003, vol. 4, list 23.

<sup>25</sup> VON CARNAP-BORNHEIM/ILKJÆR 1996, 340–43; IVERSEN 2010a, 75–77; ØRSNES 1988, 52–53; BEMMANN/BEMMANN 1998, 161; VANG PETERSEN 2020a, 75–81.

<sup>26</sup> MIKS 2007, 388–390; 456–457; RAU 2019, 32–37.

However, one might suspect that Kontny's disregard of this historical source is based on its consequence: that Attila would have ruled over Poland. Instead, he assumes that trilobate arrowheads were already in use in the Roman period. And he is right, since fragments of composite bows and trilobate arrowheads are known from Roman auxiliary units as early as the Late Republican period and onwards<sup>27</sup>. However, Kontny does not seem to be aware of this fact. Instead, the basis for his assumption is an indistinct photo of an arrowhead, now vanished, from a grave with an insecure date.

Kontny ends his chapter on the Baltic weapons with a section called "Participation in Military Actions of a Supralocal Range" (pp. 185–188) in which he argues for a Baltic participation in the attacks that led to the 2<sup>nd</sup> century bog deposits in Vimose. The basis for this theory is built upon a few weapons taken from Engelhardt's publication of the Vimose find<sup>28</sup>. I will return to this discussion. The plural in "actions" of the section title refers to the distribution of spearheads of Kazakevičius' type III which is found widely in the Kragehul and Nydam bogs in Denmark, in the Swedish deposit from Nedergården, in the central settlement sites in Uppåkra, Scania and Sorte Muld, Bornholm, the bog deposit Skedemosse on Öland, Sweden and several sites in Lithuania. Furthermore, it appears in two graves in central Germany, Dresden-Dobritz and Gübs, and a grave in Čatyr-Dag on the Crimea<sup>29</sup>. This distribution is relatively confusing as it does not indicate a specific area of origin for this type. Kontny, however, is focused on the Čatyr-Dag cemetery, suggesting that various tribes, "a fellowship of the ring", came to Crimea "during the time of the Gothic wars in the mid-3<sup>rd</sup> century (p. 179). There is, however, a problem with the date of this spearhead type that might render this interpretation unlikely. The date of finds from bogs and settlement sites is not always very precise; however, both spearheads from the Kragehul find are found attached to fragments of entrelac-ornamented stakes. They clearly belong to one of two 5<sup>th</sup> century deposits. The narrow, ornamented zone on both would suggest a late date within this century<sup>30</sup>. The precise date of the still unpublished Nydam spear is unclear, however, it was found within an area referred to as "the uppermost votive layer" and can probably be dated within the 5<sup>th</sup> century as well<sup>31</sup>. Furthermore, not all graves can be easily dated. Yet, the Lithuanian grave 5 from Taurapolis also suggests a general date of this spear head type within the 5<sup>th</sup> century<sup>32</sup>. It can be assumed that Kontny knows this date but misses to refer to it. A recent grave find near Esbjerg, Denmark can also be dated to the later 5<sup>th</sup> century<sup>33</sup>. No spear heads that the author has worked with have dates ranging over more than half a century, and for that reason it is unlikely that warriors carrying spearheads of Kazakevičius' type III could have participated in the mid-3<sup>rd</sup> century Gothic wars.

Kontny ends his chapter on the "Balts" with a praise of the slightly primitively equipped but able warriors: All this leads to a positive assessment of the military value of the Balt community from the present-day Polish lands and a paraphrase from John Ronald Reuel Tolkien: "It does not do to leave a Balt out of your calculations if you live near him" (p. 188).

<sup>27</sup> BISHOP/COULSTON 2006, 88; FISCHER 2012, 202.

<sup>28</sup> KONTNY 2023, fig. 4,53; ENGELHARDT 1869, fig. 13; 29; pl. 5,2.5; 7,23.25.28; 12,23; 14,7.10; 17,3.

<sup>29</sup> Kontny reproduces a map published by me (IVERSEN 2010a fig. 24), without reference, and with the addition of the Lithuanian finds and the find from Čatyr-Dag. He has also added a third spearhead to the Kragehul find and one from the Balsmyr bog find. I cannot agree with those. See NØRGÅRD JØRGENSEN 2008, 224; 225–289,

for the Balsmyr spear. I have not seen the Lithuanian spear head except for the depictions in KAZAKEVIČIUS 1988.

<sup>30</sup> IVERSEN 2010a, 48–51; 65–67; pl. 18; 36. – Narrow ornament zone: VANG PETERSEN 2020d, 300.

<sup>31</sup> VANG PETERSEN 2020a, 81.

<sup>32</sup> MENGHIN 1983, cat. no. 29; IVERSEN 2025, cat. no. 1072.

<sup>33</sup> Lysningen, Denmark, Spangsbjerg Kirkevej, see <http://sol.sydvestjyskemuseer.dk/> (last access: 03.11.2025): SJM 614 X-18-6.

Chapter 5, “The Germanic Shield and its Origin” (pp. 189–218) is an outlier compared to the previous chapters, since it deals with one weapon type in an over-regional context. It begins with a short history of the shield from its prototypes found in anthropology to the development of shields in the Roman and Migration periods. It expresses many of the same views as in the preceding four chapters and I will only comment on a few of them: Kontny seems to think that a round shield built by planks with a leather-covering surface is a new phenomenon in the Late Roman Period (p. 205). But how does he know that? From the wooden shield from Alken Enge to the shields in Illerup Ådal and Thorsberg we have a 200-year lacuna in which the shape of the shield can only be deduced from metal shield rim fittings found in 10–15 % of the weapon graves in northern and central Europe. The evidence indicates a variety of shapes; however, there are examples of circular shields in the Early Roman period<sup>34</sup>.

The raised rim on shield bosses in the late 3<sup>rd</sup> century AD is according to Kontny a sign that the shields were no longer flat but “convex both in the vertical and in the horizontal plane” (p. 211). This is unlikely, and we have the late shields from Nydam to prove it<sup>35</sup>. I find it more likely that the raised rim on shield bosses is introduced to protect the knuckles holding the shield beneath the shield boss.

Speaking of Nydam: Kontny mentions the well-known painted shield from the Nydam find, however, even though his source is P. Vang Petersen he does not include any of the other painted shields from this find into his reasoning, nor acknowledges that not only the Romans but also the Scandinavians painted their shields on both sides<sup>36</sup>.

#### From weaponry to interpretation

This leads us to Kontny’s use of sources. I have already pointed out that Kontny does not seem to have full knowledge of some of the sources he refers to, especially those published after the Polish version of the book from 2019. Another noticeable circumstance is the high degree of reference to his own previous work. The number of references to Kontny’s own publications in chapters 2 and 4 amounts to 32 and 30 % of all references to scholarly works (J. R. R. Tolkien and Latin writers exempted). In many cases these references replace primary sources. This is not in accordance with research praxis.

The absence of a concluding chapter is a problem. It would have helped the reader to understand the line of thought expressed in the book, and it is a chance for every author to organise his/her thoughts. For instance, what kind of organising principles ruled the Przeworsk, the Wielbark and the Baltic cultures, and what was the size of the individual political units? Only in one section in chapter 4, named “The Origins” (pp. 122–123), does Kontny reveal some thoughts about the societies in the “West Balt Barrow Culture” in the pre-Roman period. This is notable as he admits that, except for fortified villages with occasional weapon finds, sources are scarce. Here, Kontny follows a model put forward by the anthropologist Keith Otterbein<sup>37</sup>. It was a society with an absence of elites, where warriors were “after-hours professionals” organised in “local militias”, and in which “settlement clusters” fought each other without “sophisticated tactics” nor a specialised military technology. But how did these societies develop towards and throughout the period of study (the Roman and Migration periods)? How did these people become able to threaten one of history’s

<sup>34</sup> ZIELING 1989, 354–359.

<sup>36</sup> VANG PETERSEN 2020b, 141–196.

<sup>35</sup> MALMROS 2020, 100–102; VANG PETERSEN 2020b.

<sup>37</sup> OTTERBEIN 2009.

most powerful empires? These questions are all the more reasonable, since Kontny repeatedly makes the statement that well organised armies only existed in Scandinavia.

The reader will know by now that there is a lot that this reviewer and Kontny do not agree upon. Certain issues in this review have been postponed to a general discussion which will be unfolded over the next few pages: 1) The value of the Latin sources; 2) graves as a mirror of a) society and b) military organisation; 3) weapons as ethnic markers. Hopefully the reader will be able to make up his or her own mind. After all, it is exactly differing opinions that will open space for further scholarly discussion.

### The value of the Latin sources

Kontny's approach is strongly based on the historical value of Roman ethnography, in particular *De origine et situ Germanorum* or *Germania* by Tacitus (late 1<sup>st</sup> century AD) and *De origine actibusque Getarum* by Jordanes (mid-6<sup>th</sup> century AD). Especially the *Germania* is "of paramount importance" (p. 14). In most cases when such sources are available, they outrank archaeology, in other cases where discrepancies are found between Latin sources and archaeology, a thorough discussion is needed before one source is dismissed or a compromise is reached. One example is the finding of an oval miniature shield in a grave from Nowy Targ, Poland. How can it be oval when Tacitus describes the shields of the *Gotones* as round (p. 99)? Another is the discussion of the use of wooden clubs characterising the warfare of the *Aesti* in *Germania*. In Kontny's opinion this description may be transferred upon the West Balt Barrow culture in the pre-Roman Iron Age and he ends up with the following compromise: "Right now, it is difficult to decide which hypothesis is more accurate – is Tacitus' narrative a topos or rather an anachronism" (pp. 134–136). However, in some cases, the written sources are dismissed sometimes with reference to *topos* (literary urban legends used by Latin writers to amuse their readers) and sometimes it seems at convenience.

Personally, this author is more sceptical about the use of these Latin sources in the archaeology of areas remote from the Roman borders. Obviously, the Romans did not know a lot about barbarians, a lot is simply not true, a considerable number are urban legends and only some information can be considered as truths that have been buttered thinly over these vast and relatively unknown lands. The descriptions of primitive barbarians are a direct consequence of the ethnocentric Roman world view. Rome meant civilisation, distance from Rome meant barbarism and on the outskirts of the world, where the lights from civilisation did not reach, lived beast-like creatures. Furthermore, Tacitus was a romantic who yearned for a return to the Roman Republic. Even his descriptions of Germanic military structure, the military democracy, is but a description that resembles the organisation of society in the Roman republic<sup>38</sup>. Roland Steinacher refers to *Germania* as "a zombie resurrected" and the efforts by scholars to extract meaning from it and other Latin sources as "torturing these texts" (cf. Robert Latouche)<sup>39</sup>. The historical value of Jordanes has also been scrutinised and rejected<sup>40</sup>.

In archaeology, there is consensus to associate the Goths with the Sântana-de-Mureş culture of Romania and Moldova and the Černjachov culture of southern Ukraine, predominantly known from the excavation of more than 250 cemeteries with similar mortuary rites and material cul-

<sup>38</sup> IVERSEN 2010b; 2020; 2025, 20–23. Kontny only hints to these passages in regard to Scandinavia, as it would not fit to his interpretation of the Przeworsk and Wielbark cultures.

<sup>39</sup> LATOUCHE 1981, 30; STEINACHER 2023, 294.

<sup>40</sup> CHRISTENSEN 2002.

tures<sup>41</sup>. Much more controversial is the claim, especially within Polish archaeology, that the Goths migrated from Scandinavia to northern Poland or originated there at the beginning of our time, established the Wielbark culture, moved on to eastern and southeastern Poland and western Ukraine before they finally, early in the 3<sup>rd</sup> century, settled at the northern and western shores of the Black Sea<sup>42</sup>. The theory is born by cherry-picking the mid-6<sup>th</sup> century historian Jordanes' *On the origins and deeds of the Goths*<sup>43</sup> and grew popular in nationalist archaeology before World War II<sup>44</sup>. After the perversion of Nazi archaeology, it was abandoned or toned down in western archaeology, but it lives on in Polish archaeology.

### Graves as a mirror of society and military organisation

Another point of controversy is the general trust in burial evidence found in Kontny's work: he seems to follow the idea that burials tell us almost everything we need to know about prehistoric societies, they are a mirror of society, and the grave goods tell us the biographies of the dead. This understanding must be crucial seen with the eyes of a scholar of the Przeworsk culture, since the archaeological sources in Polish archaeology of the Iron Age and Migration Period only consist of little more than graves.

My opinion takes its departure in the study of the Scandinavian bogs containing large deposits of army equipment sacrifices<sup>45</sup>, in the study of settlement archaeology<sup>46</sup>, and in burials<sup>47</sup>. The comparison of these three archaeological phenomena has led to severe scepticism towards the latter as a "mirror of life". This discrepancy is in fact addressed in the first chapter of Kontny's book concerning the bog finds. Kontny describes burials as portals to another world via which the living could ship messages, and specifically "weapons were the most frequent message carriers" (p. 16).

<sup>41</sup> THOMPSON 1966; WERNER 1988; WOLFRAM 1988; HEATHER/MATTHEWS 1991; BIERBRAUER 1992; 1999; KOKOWSKI 1999a; 1999b; 2002; RAVN 2003; IONITĂ 2004; HALSALL 2007; KULIKOWSKI 2007; MAĆZYŃSKA 2007; KOKOWSKI 2010.

<sup>42</sup> BIERBRAUER 1992; WOŁAGIEWICZ 1993; URBAŃCZYK 1998; BIERBRAUER 1999; KOKOWSKI 1999a; 1999b; MAĆZYŃSKA 2007; KOKOWSKI 2010.

<sup>43</sup> Ignoring the date of the exodus from Scandinavia by Jordanes at ca. 1500 BC and the accounts of warfare against Mycenaean king Agamemnon, the sack of Troy, a derivation from biblical Gog and Magog, warfare against the (otherwise unknown) Egyptian pharaoh Vesosis and a marriage alliance with the Macedonian king Philip, father to Alexander the Great (CHRISTENSEN 2002; KULIKOWSKI 2007). Both Arne Soby Christensen and Michael Kulikowski show convincingly that the account of Jordanes (and the lost work of Cassiodorus) is a construction in order to provide the Goths with a genealogy to match Roman, Frankish and other equally fake contemporary royal genealogies. Despite the anecdotal nature

of Jordanes, great vigour has been spent on the discussion whether the mouth of the Vistula or the Pomeranian shore was the exact landing place of king Berig's ships, and whether the delay of one ship, responsible for the myth of the Gepids ("the slow ones") is detectable in the archaeological material (for instance URBAŃCZYK 1998; KOKOWSKI 1999b, 11–40 and KONTNY 2023).

<sup>44</sup> In Scandinavia for instance NERMAN 1923. The Scandinavian origin of the Goths was rejected by Rolf HACHMANN (1970), though within Denmark, he only considered Jutland. He did not consider the high degree of similarity in mortuary rituals between Zealand, the Wielbark culture and the Sântana-de-Mureş-Černjachov culture: N–S-oriented inhumation graves, the absence of weapons as grave goods and an absence of iron artefacts as grave goods (Zealand and Wielbark culture). Despite examples of connections between the Wielbark culture and Zealand (BOYE 2010), the material culture is different.

<sup>45</sup> ILKJÆR/IVERSEN 2009; IVERSEN 2010a; 2019; LØVSCHAL et al. 2019a; 2019b; 2020.

<sup>46</sup> LAURSEN/IVERSEN 2020.

<sup>47</sup> IVERSEN et al. 2021a; IVERSEN 2025.

I agree and I have expressed similar thoughts on this subject<sup>48</sup>. However, besides this quotation, there are no signs in “The Archaeology of War” that this conclusion has taken root in Kontny’s line of thought.

Let us begin with the relationship between burials and settlements. Numerous settlements are known from the Przeworsk culture, but the absence of large-scale excavations of settlement sites has left us without knowledge of the structure of these settlements and, in fact, only few trustworthy interpretations of houses. In Denmark large-scale excavations of settlement sites have been conducted since around 1960 and these sites have been crucial for the understanding of Iron Age societies<sup>49</sup>. Many of these sites are found close to contemporary burial sites. Now, the burial sites are usually quite small, and the settlements are large, often consisting of several farmsteads and covering several centuries. One good example to illustrate my point is Vorbasse in the southern part of Mid-Jutland<sup>50</sup>. Vorbasse is first and foremost famed as an early-found example of a typical Jutland village covering the period from the Late Roman epoch to the Late Viking Age with several contemporary, individually fenced farmsteads, moving a little from phase to phase. However, scattered within and just outside the settlement area, four small burial sites were found. Altogether 28 graves can be dated within a 100-year long part of the Late Roman period, but still they are greatly outnumbered by the expected number of citizens during those years. There are no graves from the remaining eight to nine centuries of the history of the village. Some of the graves seem relatively rich and some seem relatively poor in both quality and number of grave goods. To a certain degree, this is the picture all over Jutland: Large settlements and relatively small burial sites which only contain a fragment of the inhabitants that used to live in the adjacent villages<sup>51</sup>. The point and the question is: If only a fragment of the population was buried, why did the Iron Age communities bury both rich and poor? The answer may be a shock to those who believe too firmly in the reconstruction of social structures via grave furnishings: they probably did not. People buried members of society that were considered important, not necessarily all rich, but important enough to act as the “message carriers” mentioned by Kontny. If so, this must also mean that the artefacts that followed the dead into their graves may not necessarily have represented the individuals or their wealth and furthermore that we cannot always expect a total representation of that individual in each grave. Consequently, this would mean that graves cannot be used to reconstruct either social structures or panoplies for warfare. Kontny cannot have it both ways.

Another point that has to do with the relationship between settlements and graves is the interpretation of the hiatus of burials that are interpreted by Kontny as the exodus of all or nearly all Vandals from present-day Poland. It seems logical: The graves disappear so people must have moved. However, the situation is similar in southern Scandinavia. Graves become increasingly scarce or even vanish in some regions in Denmark. Early on, this contributed to speculations of a crisis in which the Anglo-Saxon conquest of an abandoned Britain in the mid-5<sup>th</sup> century also played a part<sup>52</sup>. However, the development in settlement archaeology does not support such an

<sup>48</sup> IVERSEN et al. 2021b; IVERSEN 2025.

<sup>49</sup> To mention a few: HVASS 1979; 1983; 1985; EJSTRUD/JENSEN 2000; MIKKELSEN/NØRBACH 2003; WEBLEY 2008; RUNGE 2009; HOLST 2010; 2014; SARAUW 2019; LAURSEN/IVERSEN 2020. In Germany, large-scale excavations are also beginning to result in a similar, though not identical, picture (SCHUSTER 2020).

<sup>50</sup> HVASS 1979; HANSEN/ETHELBERG 2024.

<sup>51</sup> IVERSEN et al. 2021a. This under-representativity is not only a phenomenon in Jutland. It is found in other parts of Denmark and in large parts of Europe during the Iron Age (BROWNLEE/KLEVNÄS 2024).

<sup>52</sup> See NÄSMAN 1988.



exodus from Jutland. Yes, there are far fewer graves, but the settlements are not in marked decline until the mid-6<sup>th</sup> century<sup>53</sup>. Graves cannot be understood without settlement archaeology.

This provocative statement leads to another: warfare in the Roman and Migration periods cannot be understood without the bog finds. In Kontny's book a consistently leading idea is that well-organised armies arose at the turn from the Early to the Late Roman Iron Age during the last decades of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century. This undeniable fact comes from the study of the Scandinavian bog finds. Armies of hundreds or even a thousand uniformly armed warriors with spears, javelins and shields were organised in units with platoon- and army commanders, supported by mounted warriors and units of archers. However, such a level of organisation only existed in Scandinavia (pp. 65; 167). In the Przeworsk-, the Wielbark- and the West Baltic cultures warfare was conducted in a much less organised fashion by warriors equipped with a multitude of weapon combinations ranging from wooden clubs and shields made of wood or wicker to iron weapons like spears, axes, shields with iron bosses and single-edged or Roman swords, if one could "afford" it (p. 188)<sup>54</sup>.

The theory that organised warfare was a new thing at the beginning of the Late Roman Iron Age is not necessarily true. What is true around this time is the major intensification in the scale of army sacrifices in the bogs that makes it appear as if large scale, organised warfare was a new phenomenon. Before AD 150 the number of weapons sacrificed in the bogs were few. However, the up to several hundred warriors sacrificed in Alken Enge in the first- or second decade AD were probably not professional warriors with prior experience from combat, since none of the bones showed traces of healed combat inflictions. They could have been a peasant army. Nevertheless, it is a long time between AD 10–20 and 150, a period in which our knowledge is limited.

For some reason it is imperative for Kontny to claim that bow and arrows were not used in warfare, at least not outside Scandinavia (pp. 24; 64; 108; 114; 165; 179). In chapter 1, however, Kontny lingers between the conclusion that the use of bows is a sign of the degree of Scandinavian military organization and the conflicting opinion that bows and arrows were used only for foraging during the campaigns of armies. Even so, arrowheads are discussed in all the chapters of the book. Kontny's arguments are based on two observations: the arrowheads are uncommon features in graves, and they are often leaf-shaped. According to him, such arrowheads "were of little use in combat" because "broader blades caused greater wounds in the animal's body and facilitated finding the prey by following blood traces" (p. 64). There are several objections and questions to add to these standpoints: If an arrow could kill an animal, could it not be used to kill a man? Or a horse? Did warriors in Scandinavia bring more than 1500 arrowheads to war, if they were only used to provide food for a starving army?<sup>55</sup> There is no doubt that the bow and arrow was used consist-

<sup>53</sup> HANSEN 2011; 2019; LAURSEN/IVERSEN 2020; SØNDERGÅRD/VILLUMSEN 2022. Current discussions of this mid-6<sup>th</sup> century settlement hiatus in Denmark range between settlement reorganisation and the climate crisis known as the Late Antique Little Ice Age (BÜNTGEN et al. 2016), currently trending towards the latter interpretation. A period of crisis, although with a delay of a hundred years, has been reintroduced. However, this time based on failing settlement evidence and science.

<sup>54</sup> Kontny's description is highly reminiscent of the characterisation of Germanic warfare in the almost 70-year-old textual study by the historian Edward Arthur THOMPSON 1958.

<sup>55</sup> Two thirds of more than 1500 arrowheads in Scandinavian bogs are of the bodkin-shaped type, which was developed specifically for warfare (PAULI JENSEN 2009, 372). Pauli Jensen also discerns between arrows for hunting and arrows for war along the same lines as Kontny. "Starving armies": see HALSALL 2007, 127–29: "Throughout the period, armies starved" (p. 129). In fact, there is no evidence among Iron Age faunal remains that hunting played any part in the subsistence economy in common villages nor among the elite (HIGHAM 1967; HAARNAGEL 1979, 272–276; HATTING 1989; CARDELL 2000; NILSSON 2001; KVEIBORG 2008; HESEL 2009; GOTFREDSEN et al. 2009, 96–97; KVEIBORG 2019).

ently in Scandinavian warfare, more so in the fourth than in the 3<sup>rd</sup> century<sup>56</sup>. However, if one only had the burial evidence as source, one would not conclude it, and this is an important general objection against Kontny's line of argumentation: He is comparing two different phenomena. If Scandinavia did not have its large ritual deposits of weapons no one would have opted forcefully for well-organised, well-trained armies. In Poland the situation is exactly like that. Only graves tell the story. Furthermore, in the Przeworsk culture the burial custom was cremation in which equipment of silver or bronze, like the shield bosses for the upper stratum of the armies, would smelt beyond recognition. That an elite class certainly existed in Poland is documented by the magnificent sword scabbard equipment from the bog find in Czażkowo presented on p. 138.

### Weapons as ethnic markers

Despite the alleged differences in military organisation, the warriors of the Przeworsk culture and its surroundings were still active in long-distance raids that brought them further south into central Europe and to Scandinavia. Indeed, "in the second century and possibly in the early third century considerable numbers of Balt people took part in military expeditions to the Danish isles...", however, "bearing in mind the dominant role of Przeworsk Culture weaponry in central Europe in this period, it seems much more probable that it was Przeworsk Culture military commanders who led these raids" (both p. 185). Surely, if Kontny really means to include the early 3<sup>rd</sup> century bog deposits – Illerup Ådal, Thorsberg, Vimose – he faces a contradiction: The well-organised warfare from leaders, who apparently knew little about military organisation<sup>57</sup>.

The evidence for Baltic and Przeworsk raids on Scandinavia in fig. 4,53 (p. 186, chapter 4) is all from Vimose and belongs to the early and late 2<sup>nd</sup> century. Shield bosses of Norbert Zieling's<sup>58</sup> type F2 and A2a are relatively common in most of northern and central Europe and cannot be assigned to a specific ethnicity. Nor can single-edged swords. The shield handle, fig. 4,53,11 is of N. Zieling's type P. It is relatively common in the Przeworsk culture and adjacent cultures, however, the closest parallel to the Vimose shield handle is found in the Hamfelde cemetery in Holstein<sup>59</sup>. The two spear heads bear a closer resemblance to spear heads in the northern Elbe region than the Przeworsk culture<sup>60</sup>. The fork-tongue belt buckle and an iron-bar strike-a-light are more convincing. Yet, these are very few compared to the large amount of Scandinavian equipment and cannot bear Kontny's scale of interpretation. Furthermore, they are not completely unknown to Scandinavia and Northern Germany<sup>61</sup>. A similar conclusion is also reached by Andreas Rau, who includes Xenia Pauli Jensen in his critique<sup>62</sup>. A. Rau has a razor-sharp point when he states that a multi-ethnic retinue would have had to appear in the nude and receive all their clothing and equipment at enlistment to appear as homogenous as they do in the Illerup Ådal find<sup>63</sup>.

<sup>56</sup> 201 arrowheads in the larger deposit A in Illerup Ådal versus more than 600 arrowheads in Ejsbøl (PAULI JENSEN / NØRBACH 2009, fig. 91).

<sup>57</sup> Kontny argues for a defense of Jutland organised by the wealth centre in Himlingøje, Stevns, East Zealand (p. 21). I will not go further into that discussion but find it unlikely, since Zealand itself was surrounded by much more successful "centres" in Gudme, Funen, Uppåkra, Scania and Sorte Muld, Bornholm. See the interesting late

third settlement hiatus on East Zealand in SØNDERGÅRD / VILLUMSEN 2022.

<sup>58</sup> ZIELING 1989; IVERSEN 2025.

<sup>59</sup> BANTELMANN 1971, pl. 260a.

<sup>60</sup> IVERSEN 2025.

<sup>61</sup> RAU 2023, 332.

<sup>62</sup> RAU 2023, 331. See PAULI JENSEN 2017 for a theory of travelling mercenaries like Kontny's.

<sup>63</sup> RAU 2023, 332.

Weapons are rarely ethnical markers. In most cases, the spread of weapon types in northern and central Europe are amazingly uniform and their chronologies are parallel<sup>64</sup>. This is especially evident when it comes to shield and sword equipment and less so in the case of pole arm weapons (spear and javelin heads). However, there are examples of spear- and javelin heads with a wide distribution<sup>65</sup>. This phenomenon cannot be explained as a sign of a coherent *Germania*, as was the case in Martin Jahn's groundbreaking "Die Bewaffnung der Germanen"<sup>66</sup>. It is rather the opposite: an arms race within societies in constant conflict with each other which brought about an over-regional emulation of weapons and techniques. However, armies did not often travel far to wage war as contemplated by Kontny (p. 71). Instead, neighbours fought neighbours who fought neighbours.

Professor Kontny views prehistory through a historical prism that allows him to understand barbarian warfare as relatively primitive, yet to take pride in the merits of the historical people, he thinks, inhabited his present homeland in the Roman and Migration periods. This prism may also be enlightened by recent European history. Nevertheless, not even a perky language, snappy conclusions and recurring referrals to recent popular culture can hide the fact that Kontny stands for a conservative tradition within Polish archaeology that is in desperate need of renewal. That said, any publication of Polish archaeology in an international language should be welcome<sup>67</sup>. It should be appreciated that Kontny has the bravura to go beyond the individual artefact and try to understand weapons as coherent weapon systems.

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<sup>64</sup> IVERSEN 2025.

<sup>65</sup> The fact that some of these types have been defined in Polish archaeology does not make them Polish.

<sup>66</sup> JAHN 1916.

<sup>67</sup> I realise that the same can be said about Danish archaeology.

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