



## **Roman Imports in Scandinavia: Purpose and Meaning?**

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# Roman imports in Scandinavia: their purpose and meaning?

Thomas Grane

## Introduction

What were the purpose and meaning of Roman imports into *Barbaricum*? The term 'Roman imports' was consolidated by the publication of H. J. Eggers, *Der römische Import im freien Germanien* (1951).<sup>1</sup> In his book the imports were regarded both as a source for the history of Roman-Germanic trade and as a key to an absolute chronology of *Germania*. He excluded coins and glass beads and, while he did include maps of all terra sigillata finds, Roman statuettes and Roman weapons, his main focus was on vessels of metal and glass. Today, it is clear that many Roman vessels should not be interpreted as the products of simple trade relations, but, in the absence of a more suitable label, Roman metal and glass vessels found in *Barbaricum* are still called "Roman imports". When it is used in the present article, however, this label will carry no inherent trade-related meaning.

I propose to discuss a theoretical framework and give a few examples of how I believe some of the Roman finds can be interpreted, based on finds in graves, the context in which the majority of the Roman vessels of silver, bronze and glass are recovered. Every now and then we encounter graves that contain other objects of Roman origin, such as glass gaming pieces, finger-rings, mirrors or the occasional spoon or two, but they occur only rarely. Two important groups of Roman manufacture also occasionally found in graves are *militaria* and coins. Denmark boasts some of the largest collections of Roman *militaria*. These groups of objects may well have played a significant rôle in Roman-Germanic relations, although it appears that Roman weaponry was not a status symbol among Germanic military leaders. As the major part of the finds belonging to these two groups derives from bogs and hoards, respectively, they are subject to specific conditions of deposition, preservation and recovery, which inhibit their use for the purposes of the present paper. A few Roman statuettes have been discovered in Scandinavia, but they are always single finds.

## A theoretical framework

There are a number of questions to consider as we try to detect the attitude of the Germanic peoples towards Roman luxury vessels, and how and why Roman imports were used as they were in Germanic rituals: how did the objects reach their final resting place, why were they needed, and how were they used?

### *Defining the setting of Roman imports*

Since the 19th c., Roman imports have been regarded as an important element in the creation of the social structure of the Germanic élite from the 1st c. A.D. This is apparent in the names given to this period: "Roman Iron Age", "Römerzeit" and "römische Kaiserzeit". In the 1970s and 1980s, when economic theory played a significant rôle in research, Roman imports became regarded as prestige goods, part of an important exchange economy between Germanic chieftains. As such, imports were a means to form political alliances

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1 Eggers 1951.

and consolidate power — the so-called “chieftains’ trade”.<sup>2</sup> Generally speaking, the dominant view was that Roman luxury vessels signified the chieftain’s knowledge of, and desire to imitate, Roman banqueting rituals — evidence of an affinity with a more ‘classy’ society than his own. The imports would symbolise the transference of Roman ideals and influences, thereby supporting the chieftain’s position of power in Germanic society.<sup>3</sup> Such a view would imply that the Roman luxury vessels were imported and used in a way that preserved their original meaning, and that the so-called ‘import graves’ would symbolise the position of the deceased in the local political and social setting. This interpretation of Germanic elite graves has been criticised for its one-sidedness and an outdated colonialist view that Roman civilization was superior to the prehistoric societies of Europe, seeing an uncritical transference of Roman influences to a lesser civilization.

#### *Mortuary practice*

The theoretical premise for such views has also been challenged by scholars using social anthropological studies, as well as social theory. The argument is that material culture itself is transformed by the interactions, and that it takes part in the change in the use and meaning of objects through social practice and agency; the material culture lives on in a new way in a new setting detached from its original meaning. As stated by F. Ekengren, one of the scholars who has engaged this particular problem more recently,

Quite often traditional studies focus on the presumed prestigious value of exotic objects, and overlook the processes within the exchange situation, as well as the daily use of these objects in the receiving society, through which these values were created and/or negotiated.

Ekengren’s dissertation, *Ritualization – hybridization – fragmentation: the mutability of Roman vessels in Germania Magna AD 1-400* (2009), dealt, among other things, with the ritualized framework of mortuary practices: that is, how Roman vessels were used along with local vessels and other products in the different rituals practiced in the context of the passing from life to death. In his attempt to address how the meaning of vessels of Roman origin was transformed when they were used in Germanic mortuary practices, Ekengren covered a number of topics in a detailed analysis of Germanic burial rituals.<sup>4</sup> This approach to Roman imports and mortuary practices in *Germania*, based on post-colonial and social theories, produced a number of interesting points, but it also shows that problems may arise when previous approaches are set aside. I will highlight some of the problems that arise from Ekengren’s analyses.

Ekengren analysed the location of grave goods in the settings of a number of graves: whether they were placed near or on the body, under the feet or above the head, on a ledge above the grave, or on top of the coffin. He also examined how different objects were grouped — for example, which objects were placed together or on top of one another. He concluded that Roman and Germanic objects were not placed in the graves with any regard to their origin, nor were drinking vessels placed together in a manner indicating any attempt to copy Roman banqueting sets. He thereby dismissed the notion that the Germanic elite unconsciously imitated Roman drinking rituals.<sup>5</sup> As he noted,<sup>6</sup> this observation in fact supports the statement by Tacitus (*Germ.* 5.3):

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2 Hedeager 1992, 87-90 and 152-62.

3 For a synopsis of this view see Ekengren 2009, 15-17.

4 Ibid. 29-30.

5 Ibid. 209-17.

6 Ibid. 127 and 158.

One may see among them silver vases, given as gifts to their envoys and chieftains, but treated as of no more value than earthenware.

Next I turn to some of the problems that such an approach does not solve. The nature of the critique of earlier theories seems to make it impossible to re-use parts of those theories. For instance, the theory of transformation *versus* transmission leaves little room for the possibility that some of the inherent meaning of, in this case, Roman vessels actually does stay with the objects. According to this approach, it seems that the function and meaning of an object must change into something else. Also rejected is the predominant interpretation of élite graves in Scandinavia as indicating the social status of the deceased; rather, the grave goods were meant to create a new image of the deceased in the afterlife – which could have very little to do with who the person was when living. Like most archaeological theories, these have grown out of research by prehistoric archaeologists with no written sources at their disposal. Perhaps for that reason anthropological research into tribal behaviour (often, for example, in Africa or Indonesia) has become a tool for the understanding of rituals. With this perspective there is a tendency to ignore the potential of contemporary written sources, or even to view them as contaminated and misguided.<sup>7</sup>

Often encountered is the post-processual statement that the dead do not bury themselves. Thus,

[the] burials would reflect not the realities of the lives of the people buried in them, but images of their lives and of their role in society in the minds of those arranging the burial and participating in the ritual.<sup>8</sup>

This statement is another aspect of the view outlined above. However, postulating that the deceased had nothing to do with the way the burial was orchestrated, and that the grave goods do not reflect the social setting of the deceased but rather the status desired by the descendants, will invariably disregard a certain complexity of a given society, though claiming to do the opposite. Of course, once passed away the deceased will have no say, but in a Germanic society of the Roman Iron Age it is reasonable to assume that burials followed a given set of rituals; and those rituals would have been rooted in tradition, as tradition is one of the key elements in the construction of a society, and without traditions creating rituals no society is sustainable. At the same time, traditions are shaped by a society's leaders, be they elders or social, religious or military leaders. We should therefore assume that, prior to his death, the person buried would have had knowledge of rituals and mortuary practices, and may also have taken part in constructing his or her own after-life settings. Ethnographic sources may also support the idea, however, that the position of the deceased may be just as vital for the character of the funeral as the wish to further the position of his descendants through mortuary practices as implied by the statement above.<sup>9</sup>

This could be the case in Roman society. The tomb of Lucius Poblicius, a self-made man who had served in the legion, was erected at Cologne in c.A.D. 40 according to his will and testament, as recorded on the monument.<sup>10</sup> Augustus's mausoleum was even ready for him decades before his death. The Romans had abbreviations for this, such as VF (*vivus fecit*, 'he did it while alive') or VP (*vivus posuit*, 'he erected it while alive').<sup>11</sup> An inscription

7 Birch Iversen 2010.

8 Härke 1994, 32.

9 Hayden 2009, 41.

10 Precht 1975.

11 Keppie 2001, 139.

on a grave-marker at York (*RIB* 678) bears clear witness to the practice:

M Verec Diogenes sevir col Ebor idem quinq et cives Biturix cubus haec sibi vivus fecit.

Marcus Verecundus Diogenes, *sevir* of the colony of Eburacum, who died here, a citizen of Biturix Cubus [the region of Bourges], made this while still alive.

In general, the purpose of Roman grave monuments was to preserve the memory of the deceased, presenting his wealth and dignity. This purpose was even defined in legal texts.<sup>12</sup>

From the pharaohs of Egypt to Queen Margaret II of Denmark, whose glass sarcophagus has been designed by one of Denmark's leading sculptors, members of the aristocracy have concerned themselves with the character of their final resting place. Analogies to present-day tribal communities can provide indications of social practices in trans-egalitarian or early state societies, but they should be used carefully, and not necessarily be considered any more reliable than archaeological and literary sources from neighbouring societies contemporary to the Iron Age. They may not correspond well, however, with post-processual and post-colonial theories.

#### *Defining levels of contact*

Another problem is that there is no attempt to clarify how all of these Roman imports arrived in *Barbaricum*. Ekengren, for instance, mentions on several occasions that Roman imports have been connected with gift giving,<sup>13</sup> but he interprets this view as an acknowledgement of the Germanic peoples' conformity to a Roman foreign policy — they accept Roman rules. Even though Roman imports were originally given as diplomatic gifts, his view is that their function and meaning could have had little to do with how they were used; thus it is of little consequence how the imports entered *Barbaricum*, since their meaning was transformed anyway. I would never object to the idea that a Roman vessel's meaning and function could change, but I do not believe that such a change in the meaning and function is always a given; and it is certainly of no less interest *how* the imports entered *Barbaricum*.

When Roman objects are found in *Barbaricum*, scholars generally talk about three ways by which the objects could have arrived — trade, 'subsidiaries', and booty — yet these are rarely explored in much depth. While this is not the place for a full analysis, I will outline the three most obvious possibilities:

#### (a) Trade

In relation to Roman objects in *Barbaricum*, this type of exchange, namely trade, was long regarded as the main form, but it has become clear that trade can reflect different kinds of contact.<sup>14</sup> In the regions closest to the Roman empire, trade in everyday goods can be recognized when a multitude of objects of various forms and uses are found. In more distant regions, such as Scandinavia, the presence of Roman objects must be related to another form of contact, which in my view is most likely to be connected to 'subsidiaries'.

#### (b) 'Subsidiaries'

The term 'subsidiaries' covers a wide range of transactions, from diplomatic gifts to tribute and pay-offs. Such relations had a military and/or political nature, but seldom is it pondered how they differ from one another. One form of Germanic military aid to the Romans

<sup>12</sup> Carroll 2006, 8-21.

<sup>13</sup> Ekengren 2009, 29, 36 and 214.

<sup>14</sup> Eggers 1951; Kunow 1983; Hedeager 1992.

was when warriors joined the auxiliaries, either voluntarily or forced by way of a peace treaty; evidence for this comes from epigraphic and literary sources.<sup>15</sup> More multifaceted is another form of military aid, in which tribes are paid in coin to help the Romans in various ways. The different possibilities are often proposed indiscriminately: we hear of *auxilarii*, irregular auxiliaries and *foederati*, but we should distinguish between individuals serving in the Roman army, a small chieftain and his men who are hired, for instance, as scouts, and a chieftain or king of a larger region who has negotiated an agreement or alliance with Rome. These categories are not the same, and they are not reflected in the archaeological material in the same way.

### (c) Booty

Booty is the most elusive possibility, in that it is practically impossible to say for certain if a particular item is booty. In his description of the fall of their king Maroboduus, Tacitus (*Ann.* 2.62.3) mentions old booty found in the royal seat of the Marcomanni. Yet little evidence from archaeological contexts will be able to verify the interpretation of an object as booty. For Roman material in graves in *Germania*, booty is often presented as a possibility, yet this interpretation is never applied to objects originating in other parts of *Barbaricum*: such items are always seen as a sign of inter-Germanic relations. This is, incidentally, a good example of the difficulty of breaking out of stereotypical interpretations — in this case, the notion that Germanic tribes only fight Romans, not other Germanic tribes. Overall, however, I have found no evidence able to support a hypothesis that booty had any place in Germanic grave rituals.

#### *Material diversity*

The use of post-colonial and social theory has left little room for differences within the empirical material. What is termed “Germanic” archaeologically includes most of Europe outside the Roman empire. Did the Germanic ruling classes from the Scandinavian peninsula to Moravia on the Danube have the same thoughts about Roman imports and the Roman way of life? No. The grave customs in Europe of the Roman Iron Age followed an overall set of rituals and practices that was recognized in most parts of the Germanic world, but it must be considered a structure or outline. With respect to what are now termed princely or elite graves, that structure included gifts which in some way symbolized a particular status usually through one or more of the following categories: precious metals in the form of jewellery such as finger- or arm-rings and brooches; vessels of silver, copper-alloy or glass related to the banqueting sphere; and weaponry, occasionally ornamented with precious metals. Only this structure is covered by the theoretical framework, yet clearly great differences existed between different regions of *Barbaricum*. Thus post-colonial critique of previous scholars’ classification of the presence of Roman vessels as an *imitatio imperii*,<sup>16</sup> however justified that critique may be, will be misguided if regional diversity is not taken into consideration. This diversity may be found in other elements of society than mortuary practices, and those elements can support or negate any assumptions of *imitatio imperii*.

To illustrate this point, I digress briefly from Scandinavia to make a quick comparison of elite graves from three different regions of *Barbaricum*: the grave from Mušov (Czech

15 Cass. Dio 72.1.3. Cf. Wolters 1991, 114–15.

16 Ekengren 2009, 32.



Republic);<sup>17</sup> grave 1917, 2 from Leuna (central Germany);<sup>18</sup> and grave X at Tuna (central Sweden).<sup>19</sup> Each grave contained objects particular for that region. Although disturbed within a decade of the burial, the grave at Mušov contained the most varied ensemble, including locally-produced belt-fittings of bronze. Grave 1917, 2 at Leuna was equipped with three silver arrowheads. Grave X at Tuna contained various gold rings of the snake's head type. All three graves contained a number of Roman manufactured objects. The grave at Mušov, just c.100 km north of the Roman frontier, contained a large variety of vessels of glass, bronze and pottery; fragments of silver, including a set of spoons (*cochlear* and *ligula*); and other types of objects such as an oil lamp, cosmetic utensils, and scale armour. At Leuna there was a silver cup and a few bronze vessels, as well as a coin, a finger-ring, and an onion-knob *fibula* of the kind used to fasten a Roman officer's cloak. At Tuna there were a couple of ordinary Hemmoor buckets and a basin of bronze, a glass vessel, and two silver spoons of the *cochlear* type.

The Roman element in these three graves is quite varied. In the case of Mušov, the material indicates that those who equipped the grave had a thorough knowledge of Roman customs and the Roman way of life. When proximity to the frontier, the fact that the grave lies in Marcomannic territory, and the contemporary political situation are all taken into consideration, an *imitatio imperii* cannot be ruled out, although the complexity of the contents suggests that there is much more to it than that.<sup>20</sup> The Leuna grave is more varied with its four local pottery vessels, offering a different picture from the grave at Mušov, but the Roman ring, coin and *fibula* indicate that the deceased was related somehow to Rome and its army. Once again we should consider the political situation at the time of the rich graves of central Germany.<sup>21</sup> For a very short period in the 3rd c. central Germany was connected to the western provinces and the Gallic Empire. Note that a Roman pottery workshop at Haarhausen (Thüringen) was mass-producing vessels in only this period.<sup>22</sup> All these elements indicate a particular interest in certain Roman elements, something reflected also in grave 1917, 2 at Leuna. The grave at Tuna, on the other hand, lies far from the frontier in a region that was probably never known to the Romans.<sup>23</sup> The Roman objects do not point to any desire to appear Roman. Unusually, the grave contains Roman spoons, let alone two of them, but as they are of the same type and thus not a set it is not likely that they brought with them knowledge of their proper use. In other words, this grave shows no indication of an *imitatio imperii*.

This rather simple comparison between three graves serves to demonstrate that Germanic societies and their possible relations to the empire must be subject to a more differentiated approach, despite the common mortuary practices; and when we look at graves' contents, we need to look more closely at the objects themselves, and not simply divide them into groups. According to Ekengren, there is a tendency for three vessel groups to be present in the graves: a large container, a vessel for scooping, and one for drinking.<sup>24</sup> This makes sense, for a drinking ritual would involve a container with drinkable liquid such

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17 Peška and Tejral 2002.

18 Schultz 1953.

19 Nylén and Schönback 1994.

20 Grane 2007a, 62-80.

21 Ibid. 126-131 and 276.

22 Dušek 1992.

23 Grane 2007a, 214.

24 Ekengren 2009, 85.

as wine or mead; vessels with which to drink it; and a medium with which to transport it from container to drinking vessel. Yet vessels for drinking can provide different kinds of indications that are dependent on the nature of the vessel and the context in which it is found. For instance, there is a difference between a unique silver cup and a mass-produced glass vessel, although both may be Roman imports used for drinking. The individual objects embrace a great deal of information.

### The empirical material

While Roman imports in Scandinavia were included in Eggers' study of 1951, in 1987 the material was thoroughly investigated by U. Lund Hansen in her dissertation *Römischer Import im Norden*. A major difference between the two works is that Lund Hansen placed the imports within a prehistoric chronology based on locally produced objects, whereas Eggers included the imports as the basis for his chronology.<sup>25</sup> Lund Hansen discovered that imports in Scandinavia seem to have been funnelled through Denmark in general in the Roman Iron Age and through eastern Zealand in particular for the late period.<sup>26</sup> Since within Scandinavia the material from Denmark stands at the fore both quantitatively and qualitatively, the following examples will be drawn from Danish finds to illustrate how a thorough investigation of graves' contexts can provide a more varied picture of the circumstances surrounding the élite graves of the Roman Iron Age in Scandinavia.

#### *The first contact*

The first real contact between the Roman empire and southern Scandinavia was initiated at the time of Augustus' German campaigns, when literary sources report that the Romans reached at least the Elbe. There are also several archaeological indications of this encounter. The impact is detectable in period B1a, the first part of the Roman Iron Age corresponding to the first 40 years of the present era. Prior to then, very few graves contain a vessel of an Italic origin. Further, the objects were usually old when they were put in the ground.<sup>27</sup> The import graves of the first half of the 1st c. A.D. contain only a few Roman vessels, with one exception (fig. 1). These graves can be taken to support a number of scenarios. One is that the region may have seen a single diplomatic campaign, in which the Romans established a number of friendly contacts, much like what is reported by Augustus himself (*RG* 26.2.4). The patrician Velleius Paterculus, who served as a cavalry prefect under Tiberius in A.D. 5, reports (2.106.3) that the Roman fleet had circumnavigated the bays of the Ocean, and from completely unknown waters sailed up the Elbe to rejoin Tiberius' army in the land of the Semnones. Of importance here is the information that the fleet fulfilled its task within the time allotted by Tiberius and that they returned with plentiful supplies from encounters with local tribes — a point that speaks against the idea that the fleet was simply roaming around the waters near the mouth of the Elbe. Velleius has been accused of exaggerating because of his admiration of Tiberius<sup>28</sup> but, particularly with regard to the attempt to turn *Germania* into a proper province, a disbelief in what he says has been shown to be unwarranted.<sup>29</sup> As is conspicuous in fig. 1, most of the graves containing Roman vessels from the first half of the 1st c. A.D. are situated in the coastal

25 Eggers 1951, 11; Lund Hansen 1987, 125.

26 Lund Hansen *ibid.* 173, 216-24 and 242-46.

27 *Ibid.* 126 and 195.

28 E.g., Audring and Labuske 1988, 531.

29 E.g., Grane 2007a, 20-22.





Fig. 1. Map of all Danish import graves from the period B1a (A.D. 1-40) and contemporary North German graves containing a basin of Eggers type 92.

areas that a fleet circumnavigating the Cimbrian peninsula would reach.<sup>30</sup> Interestingly, in 7 graves containing Roman imports one vessel is a bronze basin, Eggers type 92, and in 4 of the graves it was the only Roman vessel. I suggest that these vessels could have come from the same source, possibly a Roman fleet. Further, there is a concentration of these basins in northern Germany, and all may have resulted from the same action.<sup>31</sup> Did a Roman fleet circumnavigate Jutland, sail up the small streams in northern Germany, cross over to the Elbe, and move south to meet up with Tiberius? Though impossible to verify, it is a fascinating idea. This is certainly not the simplest manner in which such objects may have reached the Danish coasts. One grave contained a different type of bronze basin as the only Roman piece, but along with it there was a military dagger (*pugio*) (fig. 2),<sup>32</sup> a type

30 Storgaard 2003, 110-11.

31 Hirsch *et al.* 2007, 58 and 60.

32 Madsen 1999, 74-83.

of weapon which has been found in only three graves in *Barbaricum* and should be related to the Roman army since no other examples have been found outside the empire.

After the defeat of Quintilius Varus in A.D. 9, the Romans campaigned in western *Germania* in a vain attempt to capture the traitor Arminius until the army was recalled in A.D. 16. Thereafter Rome turned to a policy of diplomacy, creating relations with Germanic chieftains in northern *Germania*. In Scandinavia, the most prominent example of these contacts is thought to be a grave at Hoby on the island of Lolland. The nature of the grave goods points to a personal contact with a high-ranking Roman official, possibly Caius Silius, commander of the army of the Upper Rhine (figs. 3-4).<sup>33</sup> The grave at Bendstrup has been related to the grave at Hoby through some of the grave goods, among them the remains of a Roman vessel consisting of 4 lion's feet, and a disc from a wine krater, thought originally to have belonged to the Hoby set.<sup>34</sup> But what did the locals think of these foreign objects,

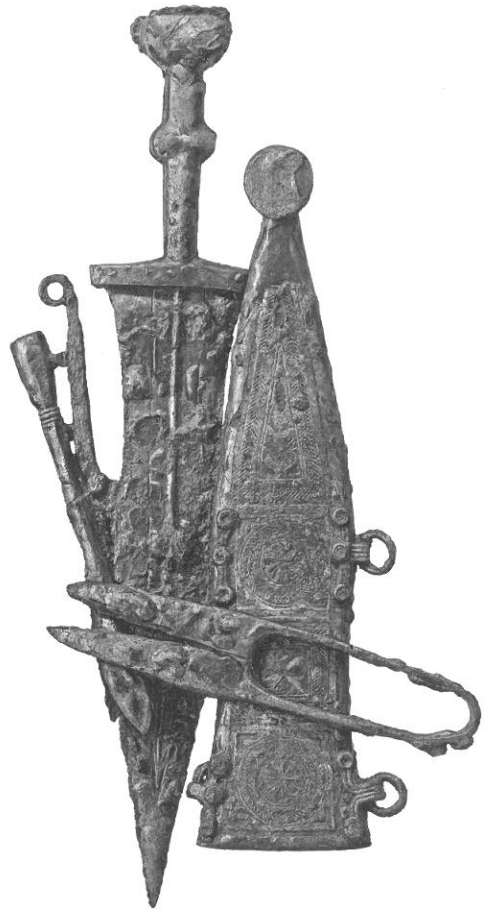


Fig. 2 (top right). Hedegård, grave A 4103. *Pugio*, Dunaföldvar type (Museum Sønderjylland–Arkæologi Haderslev; S. Hendriksen).

Fig. 3 (left). Hoby, detail of silver cup (National Museum of Denmark; L. Larsen).

Fig. 4 (bottom right). Hoby, foot of silver cup with name Silius inscribed (L. Imer, with drawing after F. Johansen 1923, 130, fig. 8).

33 Grane 2007b, 86. Secondary inscriptions beneath the foot of a pair of silver beakers give the name Silius.

34 Hedeager and Kristiansen 1981, 133-38.

and why did they put them in the graves? If we set Bendstrup aside, all of the graves contain a bronze basin. This was a type of vessel which was unusual among the Germanic peoples of southern Scandinavia, and perhaps for that reason was of interest to them. More pragmatically, a crate of basins could have been brought along by the Romans for the purpose of presenting gifts to local lords. The sheer number of imports in the grave at Hoby has led scholars to suggest that they symbolise close ties to the Romans, and even that they show an attempt to imitate a Roman lifestyle.

A relevant factor that I have not seen discussed in relation to Roman imports is the sanctity of the guest. In practically all ancient (and not so ancient) societies, the unexpected guest was treated as sacred; this was also the case among the Germans, if we can trust Tacitus (*Germ.* 21.2). It would have been the custom to exchange gifts, or at least to present gifts to the host. I would be reluctant to believe that Roman imports in *Barbaricum* constituted the only form of payment in the practice of exchange, as might be the case in a so-called "prestige goods economy", whether between Romans and Germans or in relations just between Germans; it seems preferable to interpret the imports as symbols of the bond between friends. I will even suggest, as in the scenario outlined above, that all graves of this period may be evidence of a direct relation to the Romans. Not only Caesar and Tacitus report that Romans of this era used silver vessels as gifts; a 1st-c. Greek source writing about the trade to India reports that kings on the Arabian peninsula were presented with gold objects, silver beakers and bronze vessels as gifts.<sup>35</sup>

A related issue is that of an imitation of Roman drinking rituals, as presumed by some scholars in the case of the assemblage at Hoby. A ritual linked to the receiving of guests would naturally include drinking. In a Germanic context, already prior to the advent of Roman imports this practice was attested in graves by pairs of drinking horns. I believe that the Roman imports complement a Germanic ritual more than that they substitute for one. This was not an attempt to imitate: it was a welcome addition to a growing pattern in Germanic mortuary practices.

The amount of imports and the general wealth of the goods in the grave at Hoby, combined with the inscribed name of a contemporary Roman general, suggests that a political alliance had been formed. Any payment following the contract would have been made in gold and silver coin. Hoby has generally been linked to Germanicus' campaigns,<sup>36</sup> and some scholars, including myself, have been reluctant to question the historical context in which the contact was made. The distance from the island of Lolland to the regions where the Romans were operating in *Germania* is quite considerable, and, given the political situation, it is unthinkable that the Romans should even have come close to the Baltic Sea. One wonders whether Silius was appointed commander of the four Upper Rhine legions because he had previous experience with warfare in *Germania*, having served as commander of the fleet expedition a decade earlier? In that case, the ensemble at Hoby could be related to Tiberius' rather than to Germanicus' campaign.

The Roman dagger from Hedegård should be interpreted as a symbol of the affinity of the deceased with the Roman army. Possibly this warrior, with whatever military capacity he had at his disposal, had been engaged by the Romans in connection with an expeditionary force in A.D. 5. The suggestion that the dagger is a spoil from a Roman defeat (e.g., that

35 *Periplus of the Erythraean Sea* 24 and 28 (transl. Fabricius 1883).

36 Grane 2007b, 86-87.

of Varus, which must have yielded enormous amounts of booty for the Germanic tribes) cannot be dismissed.

#### *The beginning of a power centre*

A power centre on eastern Zealand, represented by the grave site of Himlingøje and smaller sites nearby at Valløby and Varpelev (fig. 5), constituted the strongest contact between the empire and southern Scandinavia. At the transition from the Early to the Late Roman Iron Age (mid-2nd c. A.D.), a long-lasting dynasty was founded on eastern Zealand with strong ties to the province of *Germania Inferior* and its capital at Cologne, when a warrior was cremated and the remains laid to rest in a Roman vessel. This grave, marked by a barrow dominating the landscape, symbolized a new beginning of the region. Himlingøje Grave 1875-10 contained the remains of a person 30-50 years of age. It was impossible to determine the sex, but the deceased was regarded as male based on the presence of spurs. The grave goods consisted of two *situlae* with face attachments, an Eastland cauldron with a complete and a half bronze ladle-and-sieve set, two silver beakers, three knob spurs, a *fibula*, a pin and a comb of bone, a glass and a ceramic cup. Everything was deposited in a bronze saucepan (*trulla*) which served as the urn (fig. 6).<sup>37</sup> This is one of the richest graves in Scandinavia from this period. I assume that the final resting-place of the deceased was carefully chosen and not haphazard. For present purposes, we need to take a look at the urn. It was a saucepan of Eggertsen type 142 with a diameter of 22

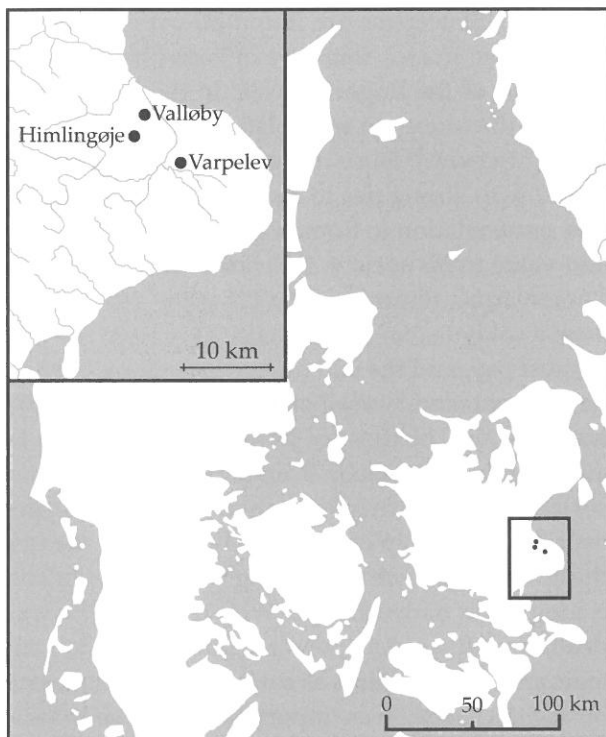


Fig. 5. Map of eastern Zealand and of Himlingøje, Valløby and Varpelev, constituting the power centre on Zealand.

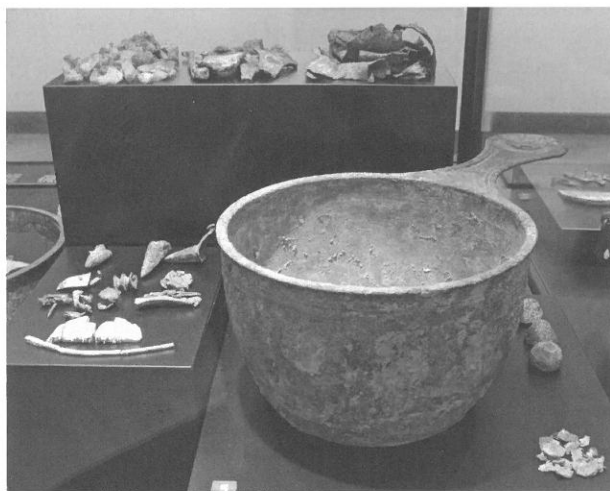


Fig. 6. Himlingøje grave 1875-10, Roman *trulla* used as urn, and fragments of grave goods damaged by fire (author).

37 Lund Hansen 1987, 412; ead. *et al.* 1995, 120-23, 146-47 and 250-51, with figs. 8-10.

cm. All the grave goods except for the urn had been placed on the pyre for the cremation. To make room for everything, several of the other objects had been bent and squeezed to fit into the urn, although, from the point of view of their size and aesthetic value, the *situlae* with face-attachments or even the Eastland cauldron would appear to have been more suitable. I therefore postulate that the saucepan was considered of importance to the deceased. Saucepans are found all over *Barbaricum* and cannot be considered especially prestigious. In fact, this type of vessel is often the only Roman object in the most simply equipped of the import graves. In the Roman world, besides being an ordinary kitchen utensil, the saucepan was related to the Roman army, since it belonged to soldiers' standard equipment.<sup>38</sup> Since this grave marks the beginning of a wealthy and influential power centre with strong ties to the empire, the saucepan may symbolize that the deceased had had some relation to Roman army life, as well as being a reflection of his military prowess and value to his society. I do not believe that this individual started as an auxiliary in the Roman army, returning with his many years of savings to take power in his home village, even if soldiers may occasionally have risen to higher ranks. Auxiliary soldiers received the poorest pay, and the real reward must have been Roman citizenship, with all the possibilities that entailed. Not all import graves in southern Scandinavia are élite graves, and some may very well be those of former auxiliaries, but wealthy graves containing precious metals as a rule also contain Roman imports. The notion that a person of low status in Roman society could return to his native Germanic village and with his accumulated wealth, take over the leadership of that society seems to me too Romano-centric. The inference behind the notion is that we are dealing with very poor societies, in which a simple Roman soldier is king in his native village. With regard to the warrior from Himlingøje, I suggest we are dealing with someone who acquired a position amongst his tribal peers through his strategic and military skills as a commander on the battlefield — something that is mentioned by Tacitus (*Germ.* 7) as important in Germanic societies.

This hypothesis finds support in a grave from Marwedel in the Elbe region. In a richly-furnished inhumation grave, the deceased was equipped with large amounts of military equipment, Roman imports and local objects. While most of the grave goods were placed above the head, a saucepan of Eggers type 142-144 was placed more or less on the centre of the body.<sup>39</sup> This grave, dated to the end of the 1st c. A.D., may belong to a person who was able to profit from Roman diplomatic advances following the civil war and the Batavian revolt of A.D. 70.

The power base centered on eastern Zealand was the first political centre in the Late Roman Iron Age. This centre had contacts to the Roman Empire as well as to different parts of *Barbaricum*, particularly Scandinavia and the coastal regions of the Baltic Sea, but also as far away as the Sarmatian lands in SE Europe.<sup>40</sup> An argument for a direct connection between Zealand and the Roman empire is that the distribution of Roman imports in Scandinavia and on the Baltic coast reveals that the greatest variety and the finest products are found on Zealand, particularly close to Himlingøje.<sup>41</sup>

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38 Kunow 1983, 75; Bishop and Coulston 2006, 119.

39 Leux 1992, 319, fig. 3B, and 322

40 Lund Hansen *et al.* 1995, 382-84; Storgaard 2003, 112-19.

41 Lund Hansen 1987, 220-24; ead. *et al.* 1995, 406-10.





Fig. 7. Varpelev, grave 'a' (National Museum of Denmark; J. Lee).

#### *The end of a tradition*

The last visible display of power in the graves of the power centre in East Zealand is found a few kilometres from Himlingøje, at a burial ground dated to the late 3rd–mid-4th c. near the village of Varpelev. The burial ground had 28 inhumation graves, four of which had been prepared with extraordinary consideration. Two, a male and a female, had been very richly furnished. Varpelev grave 'a', the male, was the most richly equipped of 4th-c. Scandinavia (fig. 7).<sup>42</sup> It contained objects symbolizing both political and military power. His political status was represented by gold jewellery, such as an arm-ring with snake-head terminals, a type of ornamentation that has been closely linked to the power centre of East Zealand.<sup>43</sup> It also contained numerous Roman and local vessels related to the banquet. His status as a military commander was symbolized by the presence of a signalling horn and a military belt with silver fittings of the traditional Late Roman belt type, linking him to the élite of the 4th–5th c.<sup>44</sup> The objects relating to the banquet, insofar as they included Roman imports, have generally been interpreted as symbols of the reach of the diplomatic contacts and the capabilities of the deceased. Among Roman imports there are a bronze basin and 6 glass vessels (4 almost complete, 2 fragmentary of which one could not be preserved). These objects are comparable to the imports from many other graves of the 1st–3rd c., but several of the Roman vessels indicate a closer knowledge of Roman lifestyle and rituals.

42 Engelhardt 1877, 349–68.

43 Lund Hansen *et al.* 1995, 389–90.

44 Grane 2011.





Fig. 8. Himlingøje, grave 1977-3, glass drinking horn (National Museum of Denmark; L. Larsen).

Whereas the graves from Himlingøje contain a large number of Roman imports, including many unique vessels, Varpelev grave 'a' stands out because 4 out of 7 vessels are unique. The large faceted vase, the purple faceted cup and the *kantharos*, a blue glass bowl blown into an openwork silver frame with a greeting in Greek, are probably from the eastern provinces; the *kantharos* also shows clear signs of use and alterations. Most enigmatic is the siphon-shaped vessel, which has been identified as a phial. It resembles a certain type of unguent container that is only found in graves and so presumably was used in funeral rituals. H. E. M. Cool has interpreted these vessels, in combination with glass vessels bearing Greek inscriptions, as related to cults having a belief in the afterlife, such as the cult of Bacchus or Christianity.<sup>45</sup> In all, the display of imports in Varpelev grave 'a' indicates that the deceased had a personal knowledge of Roman rituals.

The grave goods from Himlingøje, dating from the 2nd to the end of the 3rd c., give indications of a long-distance relationship, according to which certain types of vessels were needed partly for the purpose of redistribution. Elites at the centre would have kept the most magnificent pieces, such as the purple glass drinking horn (fig. 8), for themselves, but these vessels are mostly 'only' exquisite variations of the selected range of goods. The late 3rd-c. crisis appears to have severed the link to Zealand. When order was restored, political circumstances in the Western Empire had changed in a way that rendered the previous connections obsolete. Some of the Roman vessels from grave 'a' — for instance, the phial, the function of which is still not entirely clear, and the *kantharos*, produced in a technique known from very few examples — stand out even when compared with unusual vessels of earlier times. The evidence from Varpelev indicates that a much more personal investment was required from the leaders of society if an income like the one the region had grown accustomed to was to be maintained.

### Conclusion

Through a few examples I have attempted to suggest the layers of possible interpretations that are concealed in Roman imports in Danish graves. In general, Roman imports appear to have served as symbols of a positive contact with others. Whether we should

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<sup>45</sup> Cool 2002.

interpret those others as other Germanic chieftains or Romans depends on the context and nature of the imports. Some pan-Germanic form of ritual was clearly prevalent in the first four centuries A.D. However, compared to other parts of *Germania*, it is also clear that a deliberate selection took place, since only certain types of Roman imports reached Scandinavia.

It is also necessary that we observe the differences as well as the similarities. The objects may tell us more than just what types are present in graves. We have to address the question of how objects arrived in Scandinavia. We are no longer dealing with a 'pure' pre-historic society; rather, it is proto-historic, since we have written source material from a contemporary society which was interacting intensively with surrounding cultures, and interaction occurred on a multitude of levels. Just as *Barbaricum* cannot be treated as a single entity, so it is dangerous to isolate it from any Roman influences. As an unrivalled political, economic and cultural superpower, Roman society was fundamentally different from the Germanic, and it would be naïve to deny that such an entity had any influence on its neighbours, even if different tribes and regions in *Barbaricum* reacted differently to that influence. Equally naïve is the notion that due to a lack of familiarity with the Roman world some of the Germanic élite did not really have the possibility to choose for themselves. We should pay attention to the different levels of information that can be extracted from the evidence, both with regard to mortuary practices and rituals, as well as the overall structure and development of Germanic society.

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# ROME BEYOND ITS FRONTIERS: IMPORTS, ATTITUDES AND PRACTICES

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