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*an Interdisciplinary Anthology*

edited by  
*Mary Harlow and Marie-Louise Nosch*

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## 16. Roman Textiles and Barbarians: some observations on textile exchange between the Roman Empire and *Barbaricum*

*Zofia Kaczmarek*

The possibility of textile trade and exchange between Romans and Barbarians<sup>1</sup> has been widely discussed and benefited from a great amount of recent research. However, no one has succeeded in answering the question of whether textiles which are named as Roman imports are really of Roman provenance. In this chapter I will try to show that by combining archaeological and literary sources we can get a little bit closer to finding the solution of this crucial problem.

Although it is very easy to generalize and think of *Barbaricum* as an integral whole, a part seen by Latin authors as inferior to Roman world, modern scholars are well aware that it was very rich and diverse territory inhabited by many tribes with cultures of their own. In this chapter I will focus on only one territory – that of modern Poland,<sup>2</sup> which I think is a representative part of the Barbarian world, a part which did not have common borders with the Roman Empire and so had hampered relations with it.

However, as the analysis of relations between Romans and Barbarians show, not only those Barbarians living across the Rhine and the Danube, but also *superiores barbari* – tribes living far north of the *limes*, on the Baltic coast – played a very important role in Roman economy and policy. It was this part of the world which supplied the Empire with precious amber and, what is more, was often a background base for attacks on Roman frontiers.<sup>3</sup>

Textiles from the Roman period in Poland are not richly represented in archaeological material due to the poor preservation environment. However, there are a few examples found mainly in Pomerania. These were analyzed by Jerzy Maik and Lise Bender Jørgensen.<sup>4</sup> In Roman written sources we find a couple of mentions about the territory and the tribes that were living there. These

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<sup>1</sup> Although it may seem controversial, in this paper I will use capital 'B' for the term Barbarian(s) and *Barbaricum*, because I would like to think of these terms as an ancient proper name for peoples and territories outside the Roman Empire.

<sup>2</sup> Territories of modern Poland were in ancient geography a part of free Germania. Vistula, the greatest river in Poland, was believed to be a border line between western and eastern Germania or between Germania and European Sarmatia or even between Germania and Dacia. The territory of present-day Poland was inhabited by many different tribes, some of them, especially those living in the mouth of Vistula river, we know by name (e.g. Goths, Estii, Lugii), some of them are unknown to us (Kolendo 1998d, 107–108; Biliński 1947, 150–153). In order to avoid confusion in this chapter I will refer to the territory in question using its modern name – Poland. See also Strabo I.1.6.

<sup>3</sup> Kolendo 1981, 454.

<sup>4</sup> Jørgensen 1991, 84–92; Maik 1988; 2007.

have been analyzed by Jerzy Kolendo.<sup>5</sup> Roman literary sources have also been discussed in terms of Barbarian costume.<sup>6</sup> Many of these works successfully combined literary and archaeological material, avoided methodologically incorrect pitfalls of attempting to match every archaeological find to a description in literary sources; all of them used iconography to illustrate their main theses.

The Roman period in Poland starts in the 1st century AD and finishes around the 5th century AD (i.e. phases B1–D in the interregional relative chronology, the latter often identified with the Early Migration period).<sup>7</sup> Textiles dated to the period come in general from phases B2–C2, with only few exceptions from different phases.<sup>8</sup> The latest Roman period textile was found in Grzybnica, Szczecin province in a Wielbark Culture cemetery and is dated to the late Roman period.<sup>9</sup>

Based on the archaeological material there are two main distinct cultures: the Przeworsk and Wielbark Culture.<sup>10</sup> These two cultures follow different patterns, especially in burial customs which translate into differences in textile preservation. In the region where the Przeworsk culture was dominant (south and eastern Poland) cremation was a common rite and therefore textile finds are very rare.<sup>11</sup>

The textile finds are mainly scattered in the northern part of the Polish territory; most of the textile remains were found in Pomerania, but there are also some examples found in Silesia and few more found in other locations. They come from 30 different sites and were found in inhumation graves only, where they were preserved in close proximity to different types of metal implements. There are three main Roman period cemeteries in Poland, where most of the textiles were found: Gronowo, Odry and Lubowidz.<sup>12</sup> Unfortunately, a part of these finds was lost during the Second World War and are known only from the manuscripts by Walter von Stokar or Gertrud Sage which do not follow the latest methods of textile description and so are not sufficient for further analysis.<sup>13</sup>

Since the textiles from the Roman Period have already been analyzed,<sup>14</sup> I will give a short summary here. There are a few characteristics of textiles from the Roman period to point out. The quality of both twills and wool is much higher in the Roman period textiles than in those from the Middle Ages. This change can be observed in Scandinavian textiles as well.<sup>15</sup> When it comes to wool quality, Maik suggests three possibilities: first, that the Romans could have brought sheep with fine fleece into *Barbaricum*, where they were crossbred with local species; second, that 'Barbarians' imported raw material or thread; third, that this fine fleece came to *Barbaricum* in ready-made textiles. However, there is no evidence to make one of these possibilities more

<sup>5</sup> E.g. Kolendo 1999.

<sup>6</sup> Kolendo and Mączyńska 1991.

<sup>7</sup> The relative chronology worked out by Hans Jürgen Eggers (Eggers 1955) is commonly used for the Roman period in the central and northern Europe. It was adopted and adjusted for different regions in this part of Europe (Godłowski and Woźniak 1981, 53–57).

<sup>8</sup> Jørgensen 1991, 90.

<sup>9</sup> Maik 2001, 107.

<sup>10</sup> See map.

<sup>11</sup> Ørgensen 1991, 86; Maik 2001, 109.

<sup>12</sup> See map.

<sup>13</sup> Jørgensen 1991, 86, 90; Maik 2007, 98.

<sup>14</sup> The issue of textile imports from the Roman Empire has been widely discussed, but I think the best outline is given in the 'classical' discussion: Jørgensen and Wild 1988, 65–98.

<sup>15</sup> Maik 2007, 97.

likely than the others.<sup>16</sup> The fleece from Polish archaeological textiles corresponds to the fleece from neighbouring regions (especially the southern coast of the North Sea) and the Roman Provinces.<sup>17</sup>

The most common cloth types from Roman period in Poland are z/z tabby and twill, spin-patterned twills and diamond twills z/s. Most of them are made of wool, linens are very rare. It seems that the textile types from Poland belong to one group with similar textiles from Scandinavia and Northern Germany. It is supposed that all archaeological textiles from the Roman Period in Poland were woven on the warp-weighted loom, since no direct proofs of the application of two-beam loom were found. Most of the starting borders were tablet woven.<sup>18</sup>

Based only on the archaeological evidence it is impossible to state whether Barbarians imported textiles from the Roman Empire. However, two kinds of textiles were almost certainly of Roman origin – silks and knotted pile rugs. The latter were found in Pielgrzymów and Zakrzów, but unfortunately got lost during World War II. The same textile type, chronologically related to the Polish finds, was found in Palmyra.<sup>19</sup> Bender Jørgensen distinguishes one of the archaeological textiles ‘the Virring type’, as a Roman import. In Poland this type is dated to the end of 1st to the middle of 3rd century AD.<sup>20</sup> Her hypothesis is, however, controversial. The Virring type textiles found in Poland<sup>21</sup> were made of fleece of diverse quality, not solely of the finest wool, which Maik names ‘Roman’.<sup>22</sup> Moreover, the finest fleece is also found in other textiles of the Wielbark culture, which makes the hypothesis of imported sheep from the Roman Empire more likely than import of ready-made products.<sup>23</sup> The spin direction (mixed for Virring type – z/s or s/z) cannot be a distinctive feature of this textile type either, at least not for Polish textiles. In Pomerania all threads were spun this way from the 1st century AD.<sup>24</sup> What is more, based on the textile finds in grave no. 1 in Leśno, we can assume that local production in Pomerania was of a high quality.<sup>25</sup> The Virring type, though it is very fine and was found in rich graves, cannot from this evidence be called a Roman import. Barbarians, as other examples show, were able to weave very fine textiles. However, this hypothesis does not shatter the possibility of the import. As already mentioned, silks and knotted pile rugs were almost certainly Roman imports.

The major problem, when dealing with Roman period textiles, is how to define an import? There are some conditions which have to be met to call a product an import. First, the raw material and the technology must differ from that of local production;<sup>26</sup> secondly, the absence in a territory of a defined raw material or the product as well as the lack of technology, knowledge or skills to make a product makes import of goods more likely; thirdly, every object considered as an import needs to be carefully investigated to exclude potential imitation or falsification;<sup>27</sup> and lastly, we can recognize an import when we can acknowledge the idea of prestige linked to it, and when the object also fulfils the above-mentioned criteria. However, these are more the conditions *sine qua*

<sup>16</sup> Maik 2007, 103–105.

<sup>17</sup> Maik 1988, 168.

<sup>18</sup> Jørgensen 1991, 91; Maik 1988, 21; 2007, 99.

<sup>19</sup> Maik 1994, 12–13.

<sup>20</sup> Maik 1988, 169.

<sup>21</sup> See example – fig. 1.

<sup>22</sup> Maik 2007, 105.

<sup>23</sup> Maik 2007, 105.

<sup>24</sup> Maik 1988, 170.

<sup>25</sup> Maik 2009, 241.

<sup>26</sup> Maik 1988, 168.

<sup>27</sup> Wielowiejski 1970, s. 30.



*non* than an exhaustive definition. Therefore, the concept of import is rather blurred and depends on which of above-mentioned conditions would be considered accurate or relevant. Moreover, I think that the criteria of defining imports should be broader in order to make the definition clearer.

The simplest definition of a Roman import is given by Jerzy Wielowiejski: “Roman imports, that is the products of material culture made in various centres of the Roman Empire, which got outside the Roman borders by trade or in different way”.<sup>28</sup> It does not, however, reflect the complex nature of a Roman import.

It is reasonable to suppose that at least some part of the imported goods arrived in North-European territory as a result of trade. The question is what could Barbarians give Romans in exchange? The goods in which the Polish territory abounded in the Roman period are almost unknown. Amber was of course appreciated by Romans and we can also suppose that slaves were a precious ‘currency’,<sup>29</sup> but other goods are better known from later periods (e.g. the Middle Ages) and cannot be compared with the situation of Roman period.<sup>30</sup>

Fortunately, the researcher who would like to investigate exchange between the Roman Empire and *Barbaricum* is not obliged to work with only one category of evidence. Apart from the archaeological material, there are also literary sources. Each of these source types allows us to penetrate different parts of the past and each of them has a methodology of its own which helps to approach the problem in different way.<sup>31</sup> However, there is one important issue related to the literary evidence which is worth stressing at the outset. Today we are obliged to rely on tendentious Roman literature. The Romans were, of course, interested in the land outside their territory which is best proven by the works of Tacitus or Pliny the Elder. However, their knowledge was rather limited and often inaccurate. What is more, Romans named rivers, mountains, plains etc. differently than we do nowadays, so there are some severe problems in locating tribes and geographical territories mentioned in their works.<sup>32</sup>

Potential textile exchange between the Roman Empire and *Barbaricum* was determined by political and military actions of both sides. First of all, the presence of the Roman army stationed along the *limes* meant an increased demand for certain products. Roman soldiers presumably bought commodities for most immediate needs in the neighbourhood<sup>33</sup> and that could include clothes. It seems that the state which supplied the legions with food, drink and clothes bought the textiles,<sup>34</sup> which were known for their quality (like Gallic *sagum*) from Barbarians.<sup>35</sup> However, there are at least two examples that demonstrate the army could also purchase textiles from distant places:

<sup>28</sup> Wielowiejski 1970, 29 (translated by Z. Kaczmarek).

<sup>29</sup> The old German word *mangon*, which meant merchant is derived from Latin word for a slave trader – *mango*, *mangonis* (Brogan 1936, 219).

<sup>30</sup> Kolendo 1998a, 30, Wielowiejski 1981b, 404.

<sup>31</sup> Kolendo 1998a, 29.

<sup>32</sup> E.g. a discussion on locating four rivers mentioned in Ptolemy’s *Geography* East from the mouth of Vistula – Chronos, Rudon, Turuntos, Chesinos – which were commonly identified by researchers with Pergolya, Neman, Venta or Pärnaui, Daugava or Aa, which identifications are still controversial – the best outline of this discussion is given by Kolendo 1998c, 117–130.

<sup>33</sup> Kolendo 1981, 454.

<sup>34</sup> Tacitus claims that Roman soldiers bought clothes themselves (at least during the reign of the Iuliano-Claudian dynasty), although this information may be exaggerated, because it is put in the mouth of Percennius who was trying to provoke the legions to a rebellion (Tac., *Ann.* 1.17–18).

<sup>35</sup> Jørgensen 1991, 130.

e.g. a receipt dated AD 128<sup>36</sup> and an order dated 138 AD<sup>37</sup> for payment in advance for clothes that were delivered to the army stationed in Judea and Cappadocia from Egypt. Nevertheless, these two examples cannot be representative for all Roman provinces. They imply that the textile industry in Judea and Cappadocia had only little surplus capacity and could not provide extra services for the army.<sup>38</sup> This certainly cannot be stated for the provinces of Gallia and Germania, because we know from different literary sources that the textile industry there was flourishing. Anyway, those who benefited mostly from trade with Roman army were the Barbarians who lived nearest to the *limes*. Those living further north did not have that many opportunities to have contact with Roman culture and they were more dependent on the activities and policies of the Romans and other Barbarians.

It is safe to assume that trade between the Romans and the Barbarians was more intense and more frequent in the territories which adjoined the Roman *limes*. Trade or exchange with those tribes living further north was rare and therefore more likely to have been wholesale in character. This would explain the richer coin hoards found in the north than in the south of Europe – more money got to the northern *Barbaricum* on a one-off basis.<sup>39</sup> This hypothesis can also be supported by the fact that denominations smaller than the *as* are rarely found in the northern provinces,<sup>40</sup> which could mean that the transactions demanding larger sums of money were the most popular. What is more, the inscriptions found in the shop-cellars of Magdalensberg, a market-place in Noricum, which are a kind of book-keeping of local merchants, note not only the names of trading-partners, some of them coming from distant territories, but also the types of goods which were sold in this trade-place with amounts and weights. These book-keeping inscriptions show that the goods were sold mainly in large quantities and that some of the clients came to Magdalensberg more than once.<sup>41</sup> We can assume that those who came once a year to trade in Magdalensberg were interested in taking large quantities of goods to make such a long journey profitable. Also, it seems that the journey so far north took time and was risky, so was undertaken rather rarely.

Another aspect – Roman foreign policy – could make exchange easier in the time of peace or more difficult in the time of war. Treaties with Barbarians were followed by an exchange of gifts. When Romans fought against the Barbarians there were no conditions for the proper exchange and war often prevented other tribes, also the ones who did not fight against the Romans, from trading with them. Temporary blockades of trade routes, the enclosing of Roman towns and fortresses or the difficulty with other Barbarians' intermediation all hamper trade. Moreover, there is a huge difference between Roman relations with Barbarians in the 1st to the 3rd centuries AD and the later period. At the beginning of mutual contacts, it was the Romans who had advantage over the Barbarians, after the 3rd century the situation changed dramatically. The Barbarians managed to penetrate the *limes* and even defeat their southern neighbours in battle.

It was not only Roman foreign policy which played an important role in exchange. Kolendo suspects that most of the products of Roman provenance came into the territory of Poland as a result of complicated redistribution of goods between the Barbarians themselves. He gives the examples

<sup>36</sup> *P. RyI.* 189.

<sup>37</sup> *BGU* 1564.

<sup>38</sup> Jones 1960, 186–187.

<sup>39</sup> Godłowski 1965, 57; Wielowiejski 1970, 138.

<sup>40</sup> Crawford 1970, 45.

<sup>41</sup> Alföldy 1974, 73–74.

of gifts, spoils or dowry.<sup>42</sup> Kolendo notices that the analysis of different import types can give an idea of how the goods left the borders of Roman Empire. For example, fragile ceramics or glass must have been carefully wrapped by an experienced trader so that they would not be destroyed during transport.<sup>43</sup> In the world which did not know plastic or paper, textiles could be used as wrappings. However, very fine textiles, like the ones we find in graves of the Roman period, are unlikely to have been used as wrappings. If they were truly an import, they came to the North in less incidental ways.

We can identify some sense of Roman policy because it was of importance to the Roman writers. The Barbarians remain mute, a great obstacle in any survey, but especially in analyzing the contacts of the Roman Empire and the Barbarians living further north of the *limes*, like those living in the territory of modern Poland. However, some Roman writers succeeded in mentioning some of the events that had taken place in the far north.<sup>44</sup> Strabo<sup>45</sup> mentions that Marbodius conquered the Lugii<sup>46</sup> living in the territory of Southern and Middle Poland. His kingdom was destroyed when a group of Goths, another people living in Pomerania, attacked and robbed the capital. Kolendo suggests that the stolen goods could then have been taken back to Poland.<sup>47</sup> We also learn of the Polish territory from Pliny's report of a Roman *equitus* who undertook an expedition to the north in search of amber. We know he succeeded in his mission because he brought back such a large amount of amber that Nero could interweave it into nets which were used during gladiators' fights.<sup>48</sup>

More interesting information is given by Tacitus' in the *Annals*. He mentions that the fall of Vannius was brought about by an attack of the Lugii, who wanted to acquire Roman goods, which were then redistributed by the king.<sup>49</sup> However, when analyzing this information one should be very careful. Tacitus, as a Roman citizen, could not understand the true reasons for the attack (although he mentions that Vannius was hated by the neighbouring people because of his pride). He might have suspected that the Roman imports were the reason, because in his mind Roman culture (and its material equivalents) were worth fighting for. The fourth mention of the Lugii in literary sources provides the only information of direct contacts between the Roman Empire and people living in the territory of modern Poland. Cassius Dio writes that Domitian sent 100 horsemen to help the Lugii in their fight against Svebian tribes.<sup>50</sup>

The last great event which influenced the north before the so-called "Third Century Crisis" were The Marcomanic wars.<sup>51</sup> They marked the beginning of the great movements of *superiores barbari*, the movements which caused the decline of the Empire in later periods. During these wars, the Roman provinces of Noricum and Pannonia were destroyed and never fully rebuilt. The Marcomanic wars influenced Roman contacts with the Polish territory mainly because it seems that these two provinces (Noricum and Pannonia) were the main conduit by which Roman imports reached Poland.<sup>52</sup>

<sup>42</sup> Kolendo 1998a, 32.

<sup>43</sup> Kolendo 1998a, 32; see also Godłowski 1965, 59.

<sup>44</sup> Kolendo 1998a, 35–36.

<sup>45</sup> Strabo, 7.1.3.

<sup>46</sup> See map.

<sup>47</sup> Kolendo 1998a, 35.

<sup>48</sup> Plin., *Nat. His.*, 37.45.

<sup>49</sup> Tac. *Ann.*, XII.29–30.

<sup>50</sup> Cass. Dio LXVII.5.2; Kolendo 1998a, 35; Wielowiejski 1981a, 48.

<sup>51</sup> E.g. *SHA*, *MA*, 13–14.

<sup>52</sup> Wielowiejski 1970, 15.

However, in the 3rd century AD the Polish territory witnessed a great change – the German tribes were being pushed southwards and the Slavs were slowly replacing the former inhabitants of these lands. Also in this period, the dominant role of trade in the inflow of Roman imports is replaced by the imports coming from banditry and wars. It is also the period of great changes in the Roman Empire. Barbarians started to settle inside the Roman territory and to join the army, and by the end of 4th century AD the defence of the Rhine line was totally in their hands.<sup>53</sup>

After the events of the 3rd century, the Roman Empire changed dramatically. The centre of the state was moved eastwards to Constantinople. Roman policy towards Barbarians also changed, since Barbarians gradually gained influence over a weakened Rome. Considering this shift in terms of exchange, we can also note that eastern trade routes became more significant, e.g. the Pontiac route along the Dniester. From this period we also find more imports of Eastern provenance, like knotted pile rugs.

Roman literary sources on textile production and trade have been discussed elsewhere.<sup>54</sup> That is why, in this chapter, I focus on those texts which do not speak explicitly about textiles, but present the political history of the Roman Empire and *Barbaricum*. They cannot answer the question whether the Virring type was a Roman import or not, or answer questions about Roman weaving technology. They can, however, indicate those periods in which textile exchange was possible, stimulated or blocked. When we compare these periods with the chronology of textile finds we get an idea about the possibility of exchange.

Moreover, the careful analysis of literary sources which mention textile production makes one wonder whether the Roman authors really knew anything or cared about textile production and trade. We can read about sheep breeding, banned trousers, barbarian clothes, textile contests (like the one between Archne and Minerva described in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*<sup>55</sup>) or market places (where we can only suppose that textiles were sold). These texts, however interesting, cannot help in answering the question of Roman textile exports to *Barbaricum*. I believe that they are not appropriate means to solve this problem. Although it is very tempting to support archaeological evidence with Pliny's *Natural History* or Diocletian's Price Edict, one should remember that those sources have their limitations. The limitation in the literary sources such as Pliny's *Natural History* consists in the fact that these authors did not practice any craft, because it was forbidden by Roman tradition for the male aristocracy to engage in manual labour. Roman writers only knew textile production from observation and their descriptions show that they very often did not understand the process they observed.<sup>56</sup> Of course, textile craft was the domain of women, it was considered to be noble work for aristocratic wives and daughters,<sup>57</sup> but Roman women did not leave any written evidence of their work (or at least any we know of).

Diocletian's Price Edict, although it mentions over 150 textile types, is very problematic. First of all, we do not know whether it was ever enforced. The severe penalties for those who do not observe these laws (the death penalty) indicates the problems which legislators had in enforcing their edicts. What is more, the comparison of the prices between ready-made products and raw materials shows that the producer got very little remuneration for his work. Probably the ready-

<sup>53</sup> Kolendo 1998b, 19–23.

<sup>54</sup> E.g. Wild 2000.

<sup>55</sup> Ovid. *Met.* 6.1–146.

<sup>56</sup> Wild 2000, 211.

<sup>57</sup> See for example: Liv., 1.57.

made products were more a kind of taxation (like the *annona* in the 3rd century) to support the Roman army. This means that the prices in the Edict were not addressed to civilians, but to the producers who supplied the Roman army.<sup>58</sup> Moreover, we are not able to match archaeological textiles to textiles' names given in the Edict. The latter problem refers to all written sources, since very often we do not know what a specific word means. We are not able to trace the semantic shift which could appear with technological changes.<sup>59</sup> It would be unprofessional to try to reconstruct the textile production on such a frail basis.<sup>60</sup>

However, when comparing the chronology of an archaeological object of certain Roman provenance with the information about Roman and Barbarians' policy in written sources, we can note that there are the specific periods in Roman history which influenced the inflow of Roman imports into *Barbaricum*, i.e. Polish territory. The first of these periods was the 'Czech' one, dated to the reigns of Augustus and Tiberius (early 1st century AD). During this period Roman imports came into the territory of modern Poland via the Marobodus' kingdom, which, as mentioned above, conquered the Lugii. Some of the imports might also have been brought back by Goths who destroyed the capital of the Marcomans. Afterwards, the amber gained significance.<sup>61</sup> Another phase, 'Slovakian', is related to the existence of *Regnum Vannianum* and its beginning is dated to the middle of the 1st century AD. It lasted a little longer than the Vannius kingdom, it stretched up to the Marcomanic wars (166–180 AD). The long duration of this phase is probably the result of the redistribution of Roman imports, first by Vannius and then by the Lugii. In this period we note the highest number of Roman imports, which is also true for the inflow of Roman coins.<sup>62</sup> During the Marcomanic wars there is a significant reduction in the number of Roman imports from the Danubian provinces. Moreover, it seems that this situation was used by the merchants from the Western provinces who came into Pomerania by sea, via Scandinavian waters.<sup>63</sup> It seems that neither the expedition of the Roman *equitus* nor the help for the Lugii sent by Domitian influenced the inflow of Roman imports. The possible explanation of this fact is that these events were too short-lived to leave their mark in the archaeological evidence.

Applying the method of combining archaeological material and Roman literary sources in textile analysis is more problematic, but not impossible. It seems that the easiest and cheapest<sup>64</sup> way of transporting textiles is by water. Roman iconography, like the Igel monument, showing the floating of textiles in a kind of a raft, suggests that this kind of transportation was also practised in antiquity.<sup>65</sup> The emphasis put on the depiction of transport both by water and by land can be explained by the fact that the Secundinii of Igel sold their textiles outside the local market.<sup>66</sup> These scenes stress not only the importance of water transport for wholesale trade, but also a wide network of trade connections in Roman Gaul.<sup>67</sup> We encounter the Gallic textile export in different literary sources, Diocletian's Price Edict to mention just one. When we compare this with information about Roman

<sup>58</sup> Barańscy and Janiszewski 2007, 17.

<sup>59</sup> Wild 2000, 209.

<sup>60</sup> Jones 1960, 183.

<sup>61</sup> Wielowiejski 1981b, 399.

<sup>62</sup> Wielowiejski 1981b, 399; Kunisz 1969, 60, 63.

<sup>63</sup> Kolendo 1981, 465; Wielowiejski 1981b, 399.

<sup>64</sup> Comparing the prices in Diocletian's Price Edict – chapters 17.1 and 37.

<sup>65</sup> Drinkwater 1982, 123–124.

<sup>66</sup> Drinkwater 1982, 116.

<sup>67</sup> Young 2000, 227.



policy and trade routes, we note that there is one period, during Marcomanic wars and later, when the sea route via Scandinavia gained significance. It is then possible that textiles woven in Gallia were floated by the river Rhine to the North Sea and then transported to the Polish coast by ship. This would support Bender Jørgensen's argument that the Virring type textile was of Gallic origin.<sup>68</sup> Comparative studies on imports found in northern and southern Poland show that in Pomerania there is a greater percentage of precious imports, such as metal vases, which could mean that this region was more interested in luxury goods.<sup>69</sup> This fact can also be an argument for the Roman origin of the Virring type, which is considered a high-quality, luxury textile.

One must be aware of the complexity of textile production, especially when considering production for export. It consisted of many different crafts and demanded various skills from sheep breeding or plant growing to fulling. It demanded a certain space not only for farm works or setting the loom, but also for the storage of raw materials and finished products. It was a complex chain of processes which needed very good organisation to be efficient. However, Roman commerce seems to be very professional, a quality which also applies to the textile trade.<sup>70</sup>

From the end of the Flavian period (i.e. the end of Domitian's war against Chatti c. 85 AD), it was safe to bring goods along the river Rhine.<sup>71</sup> The Virring type found in Poland dates to the end of 1st century, as mentioned above. By mid-3rd century such textiles are starting to disappear, that is at a time when several usurpations in Gallia and in Germania Inferior are disturbing the peace. The historical data fit the archaeological evidence in this instance.<sup>72</sup> This means that from the historical point of view importing the Virring type textiles from the provinces of the Roman Empire was possible due to the specific conditions which existed in the period to which these textiles are dated. However, it would be necessary to check whether the most intense inflow of the Virring type can be dated to the end of the 2nd century, when the sea route is gaining in significance.<sup>73</sup> Dispersion of other types of Roman imports show that they are mainly found in the regions near to the main trade and communication routes.<sup>74</sup> That would be the case of Pomerania, especially in the time when the sea route was the most frequently used.

I am well aware of the limitations of this method when applied to the archaeological textiles. For example, due to the specific preservation environment, we cannot be sure that any of the textile assemblages we have is representative of the Roman period. Moreover, the historical method cannot be the only distinctive condition for Roman imports. However, my goal was not to answer the question of whether the Barbarians imported textiles from the Roman Empire. I wanted to demonstrate that by combing archaeological evidence with written sources we can get closer to answering the question of whether such import was possible. Literary evidence does not undermine the technological reservation mentioned above. However, historical sources when compared to archaeological data highlight that the Virring type textiles are likely to have been imported into the Polish territory from the Roman Empire.

<sup>68</sup> E.g. Jørgensen and Wild 1988, 71.

<sup>69</sup> Godłowski 1965, 57.

<sup>70</sup> Drinkwater 1982, 113–114, 116.

<sup>71</sup> Królczyk 2010, 61.

<sup>72</sup> See for example: Majewski 1946, 186–187.

<sup>73</sup> Olwen Brogan claims that in the 2nd century AD objects of Rhenish and Gallic provenance started to enter the market in Pomerania, inhabited at this time by Rugii. Although his theses seem to emphasise the significance of the sea-route, they are scarcely supported by the archaeological material (Brogans 1936, 201; Wielowiejski 1970, 284–285).

<sup>74</sup> Kolendo 1981, 459.

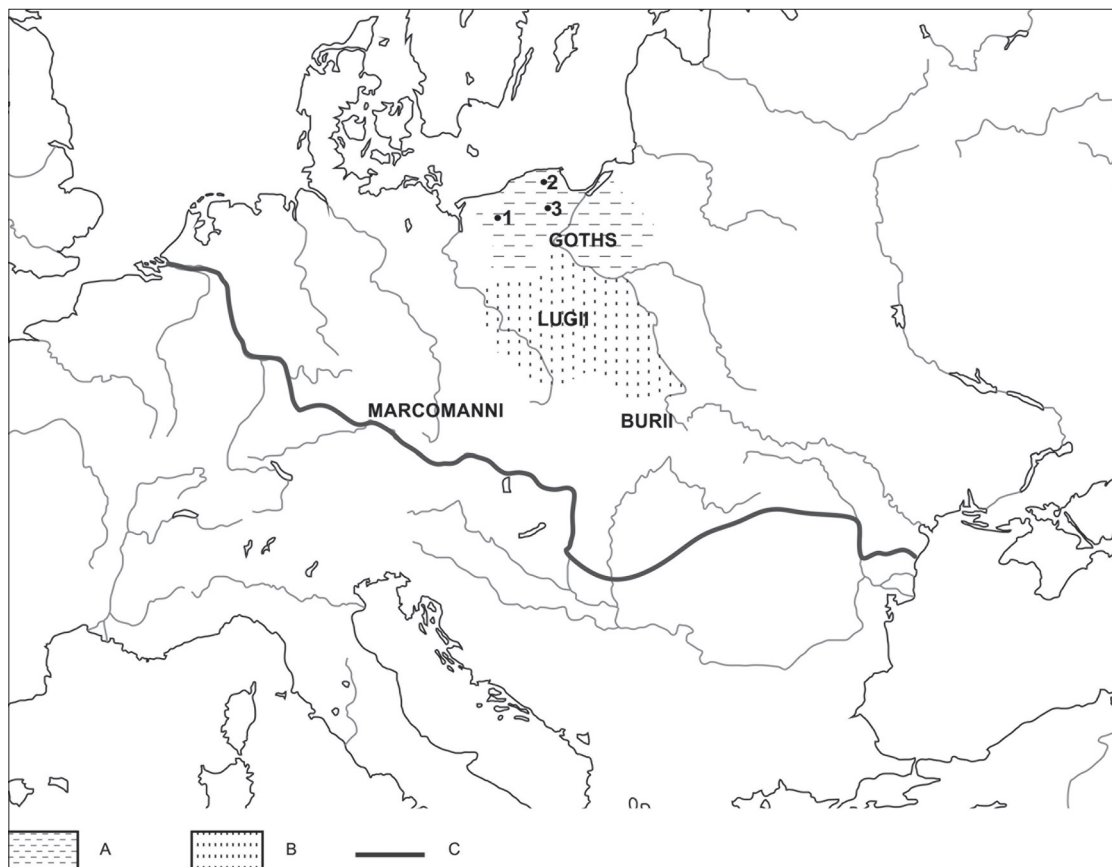


Fig. 16.1 The Roman period in Poland, the end of the 2nd century AD (drawn by Ł. Kaczmarek): Archaeological Cultures: A – Wielbark Culture, B – Przeworsk Culture, C – the Roman limes, Archeological Sites: 1 – Gronowo, 2 – Lubowidz, 3 – Odry.



Fig. 16.2 Gronowo, Drawsko Pomorskie County (powiat), West Pomeranian Voivodeship, barrow 3, grave 2, the Virring type textile (Photo by and courtesy of J. Maik).

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<sup>75</sup> In brackets I give English or German equivalents of Polish titles to facilitate non-Polish readers following quoted works.



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