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## Motif of a squat dancing figure on an 8th century ornament from the northern edge of Prague

### ANNOTATION

The bronze belt fitting found in 2020 in Prague 8-Dolní Chabry lacks the finds' circumstances. The fitting with the motif of a squat dancing naked figure with a neck ring and hands in an adoration gesture is unique. The same multiple motifs are on mid-8th century strap end found in the equestrian grave at Nové Zámky in Slovakia. This anthropomorphic motif, evidenced on less than ten sites in Bohemia, can convey a version of the ritual (dancing priestess or goddess) or a heroic legend, modified by the local environment. The closest analogies of anthropomorphic motifs come from sites at Prague-Šárka and Kosoř / Prague-Radotín and definitely relate to the late Classical tradition. If the fitting comes from Dolní Chabry, it is the earliest early medieval find in the cadastre of the former village (now Prague).

### SUMMARY

An 8<sup>th</sup> century bronze belt mount was found at a bus stop in 2020 in Prague 8-Dolní Chabry (Fig. 1), unfortunately relocated, probably lost by the original finder – lay detectorist. The lead bronze cast (RFA) mount is unique, bearing a rare motif of a squat dancing naked figure with a neck-ring, and hands in an adoration gesture (Fig. 2: 2).

The same multiple motifs are on the strap end found in the equestrian grave 232 at Nové Zámky (Slovakia; Fig. 2: 1), but they do not occur on the fittings of the main strap. The grave garniture dates most possibly to the mid-8<sup>th</sup> century. The motif can convey a domestic version of the ritual (dancing priestess or goddess) or a heroic legend. The artefact belongs to a narrower group of fittings with anthropomorphic motifs, of which about 9–10 pieces are documented in Bohemia. Spatially closest finds come from the Prague hillfort of Šárka (Prague 6; sitting goddess with a crook or rather personification of the city of Rome or Constantinople, riders Fig. 5: 1, 2) and Kosoř (Prague 5; portrait of emperor and rider on a monster with a lion's head; summarised by PROFANTOVÁ 2018). Tradition of dancing (?) figure is evidenced in northern Tisza region on the circular ornaments of the 7<sup>th</sup> century bags, with more schematic design (Fig. 2: 3). The inspiration probably derives from the Eastern Mediterranean; possible patterns could be on silk fabrics.

If we consider that the artefact could come from the northern edge of Prague, it could originally have been found in the wider hinterland of the Zámka by Bohnice hillfort in Prague-Bohnice. It functioned in the 8<sup>th</sup> century with a possible overlap to the 9<sup>th</sup> century (Fig. 1). Meaningful may also be the position of Dolní Chabry on the long-distance Trstenice route, along which many impulses from the southeast spread to Bohemia. The Chabry belt mount expanded the range of anthropomorphic motifs known from the Czech Republic indicating long-distance contacts - either import or adoption of a strongly symbolic motif.

**Fig. 1.** Prague-Dolní Chabry, Bohnice-Zámka hillfort and surroundings: early medieval sites on the LIDAR derived image. Graphics by K. Levá. **Circle** – settlement, **rectangle** – burial ground, **cross** – church, **orange** – cremation burials. **1** – Prague-Dolní Chabry, Na rybníčku; **2** – Dolní Chabry, Hrušovanské Square; **3A** – Dolní Chabry, Church of Decollation of St. John the Baptist; **3B** – Dolní Chabry, by Červené vršky; **4** – Horní Chabry, burial ground (approximately the southern part of the cadastre); **5** – Prague-Čimice; **6** – Prague-Bohnice, Eledrova Street, **7** – Prague-Bohnice, site Tříkrálka; **8** – Prague-Bohnice, site Čihadlo, **9** – Bohnice-Zámka bailey(?); **10** – Bohnice-Zámka, hillfort; **11** – Brnky (Zdíby municipality, Prague-East distr.). (According to SLÁMA 1977 and maps in PROFANTOVÁ 1996).

**Fig. 2.** Motif of a naked dancing woman with adoration gesture and its analogies. Legend: **1** – Nové Zámky (SK), H 232, the strap end and its details; **2** – Prague 8-Dolní Chabry and surroundings (CZ); **3** – Tiszaders (H); **4** – Brody (Russia); **5** – Egypt. (**Sources:** 1 – copied from ČILINSKÁ 1966, Taf. 44; 2 – drawing by L. Raslová; 3 – copied from GARAM 2018, Abb. 200; 4 – copied from ČILINSKÁ 1967, Abb. 2; 5 – Budapest Museum copied from DEKAN 1972, Abb. 117).

**Fig. 3.** Chemical composition of the surface layer of the belt mount based on RFA. Determined by M. Fikrle, 2020.

**Fig. 4.** Finds of metal fittings with symbolic figural motifs in Bohemia, most often of Byzantine / East Mediterranean origin. Legend: **square** – fight of a peacock dragon / predator and a snake, ambiguous origin of the motif; **circle** – various motifs of late Classical origin; **triangle** – special anthropomorphic motifs. Sites: **1** – Blato, Pardubice distr.; **2** – Kal, Jičín distr.; **3** – Kosoř, Prague 5; **4** – Šárka / Prague 6; **5** – Semčice, Mladá Boleslav distr.; **6** – Senohraby, Prague East; **7** – Sv. Jan pod Skalou, Beroun distr.; **8** – Tismice, Kolín distr.; **9** – Dolní Chabry / Prague 8; **10** – Nový Bydžov, Hradec Králové distr. (completed based on PROFANTOVÁ 2018).

**Fig. 5.** Gilded fittings with figural motifs from Prague hillforts. **1, 2** – Kosoř (by the edge of Prague 5-Radotín), riders on mythical animals (copied from and detail in PROFANTOVÁ 2015, 82); **3** – Šárka (Prague 6-Liboc), personification of the city of Rome or Constantinople; **4** – Šárka (Prague 6-Liboc), riders (copied from PROFANTOVÁ 2018, Abb. 5, 8 and PROFANTOVÁ 1992, Taf. 51).

*Translation by Linda Foster*