

The Kalnazīverti pectoral ornament: archaeology and folklore

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From time to time, finds are made, in the course of archaeological excavation or as chance discoveries, that surprise researchers by their unusual form or by else by some particular detail. One such example is the pectoral ornament from the cemetery of Kalnazīverti, Liepāja District.

In 1971, several bronze artefacts were brought up by ploughing on the farm of Kalnazīverti: three neck-rings with conical terminals, three armbands, one intact spiral ring and several fragments of such rings, a ring with volute terminals and fragments of an openwork Couronian pectoral ornament. Apparently, the finds also included a crossbow fibula, but this never reached Liepāja Museum. At this same site, the plough had also brought up several large boulders. In 1975, trial excavation was undertaken here, under the direction of the present author. One male burial of the 5th century AD was discovered, along with the remains of a peristalith, and various stray finds were recovered. These included several more fragments of the openwork pectoral ornament, permitting reconstruction of the ornament.

THE CONTEXT

There is no doubt that the pectoral ornament derives from a burial. The bronze ornaments found together with it – the three neck-rings with conical terminals and the band-like and flat armbands, are characteristic of the 3rd century AD, and so the pectoral ornament has been dated to the same time. However, since the burial had been disturbed by ploughing, it is not entirely clear whether all the artefacts come from the same grave.

THE STRUCTURE AND COMPOSITION OF THE PECTORAL ORNAMENT

The pectoral ornament consists of rectangular and triangular openwork spacer plates, connected by rings. The lower margin of the ornament is lined with flat lunulae. It is not clear how the pectoral ornament would have been

attached to the dress. On the well-known pectoral ornament from Bandužiai, two dress pins were provided for this purpose (Stankus, 1995, p. 89). No dress-pins were found in the area where the Kalnazīverti ornament was discovered. It may have been attached by means of two fibulae, since, as mentioned above, there was a crossbow fibula among the finds.

Although the structure of the ornament is quite complex, the composition does give the impression of a carefully considered whole. The openwork spacer plates of the pectoral ornament were arranged in three rows. The top row consists of four 31 × 28 mm rectangular plates with loops at the sides (one plate is not preserved). The middle row consists of three triangles, the central one depicting a scene. The lower row has narrow rectangular spacer plates, to which flat lunulae are attached.

The openwork designs of the spacer plates show considerable variety: there are designs of overlapping circles and ovals, as well as straight and undulating lines. There is a different design on every spacer plate of the top and middle rows. Only the plates of the bottom row all show the same design. Evidently, the size and large number of plates in this row limited the jewellery smith's capacity for creating a different design on each plate in this row (the lower row of the ornament had 12 plates altogether, nine of which were preserved). The ornament is generally in geometric style. The only exception is the central triangle of the ornament, with the represented scene. In such folk art, accidental features do not tend to occur, and the stylistic elements, like the composition, are strictly determined by the traditions of the time. If, in a milieu where a tradition of geometric design predominated and where any kind of zoomorphic or anthropomorphic design was alien, the maker did nevertheless retreat from these principles, then the only explanation for this may be the symbolic significance of the imagery (Ģinters, 1963, p. 220). It is also significant that this stylistically different element of the ornament has been placed at the very centre, thus emphasising its importance.

THE SEMANTICS OF THE IMAGERY

What is shown in the central triangle, and what message has the maker of the ornament wanted to convey? Shown at the apex of the triangle is undoubtedly a sun with six rays. Solar symbolism appears on the ornaments of the Roman Period in the East Baltic in various guises – as a double circle cut in certain bronze armbands and fibulae (LA, 1974, Fig. 30:14, 16) and in the form of the disc brooch (Ģinters, 1963, Figs. 1–3). In this case, the closest analogy is to be found in the bronze wheel pins, where the spokes of the wheel, i.e. rays of the sun, number 5–8 (Michelbertas, 1986, p. 129, Fig. 46:3–6).

Below this, on each side under the rays, there are two rhombic crosses. The rhombus motif is not uncommon in the Roman Period: it occurs on wheel pins (Group I after M. Michelbertas; see Michelbertas, 1986, p. 129). Such examples are seen on the disc fibula from Strante Tarand Grave, and likewise on an enamelled cruciform fibula from Trikāta (Moora, 1929, Fig. VI:13; VII:6). The rhombic cross occurs on the ends of some enamelled lunulae (Frolov, 1980, Fig. 3:1, 8, 9, etc.). In terms of openwork technique, the rhombic cross of this pectoral ornament resembles the early cruciform pins. These pins have a rhombic opening in the middle of the cruciform head, while the arms of the cross terminate in discs with a perforation at the centre. In Latvia, such cruciform pins, dated to the 3rd century AD, have been found at Asītes Jaunarāji (LA, 1974, Fig. 28:14), at Salenieki Tarand Grave (Šnore, 1936, Fig. 9:19) and at Trikātas Lubu muiža (Moora, 1938, p. 693). Such cruciform pins have also been found in tarand graves in Estonia.

The rhombic cross occurs on cruciform pins later as well – in the Middle and Late Iron Age (Šnore, 1930, p. 74, 75). Regardless of its very broad spatial and temporal spread, interpretation of the semantics of the rhombic cross and rhombus motif causes certain problems. A rhombus divided into four parts by two lines, where each of the smaller rhombuses thus obtained has a dot at the centre, appears as an ownership mark already in Eneolithic farming cultures. It occurs both in the ornamentation of pottery vessels and, most significantly, on the abdomen of pottery female figurines used in fertility rites (Eneolit SSSR, 1982, Fig. LVI:4; XCII). As a symbol of a sown field, this sign tends to be connected with agrarian and fertility magic (Rybakov, 1981, p. 46–50). In the area of present-day Latvia, an arrangement of four dotted rhombuses first appears in the Early Bronze Age in the designs

on Lubāna Ware (Deņisova, 1987, p. 118, Fig. 2:3), namely at the time when the transition to a production economy was taking place in the East Baltic. That this symbol was retained in the Iron Age, too, is indicated, for example, by the 10th–11th century Semigallian cruciform pins from Ciemalde (Žiemgaliai, 2005, p. 99, Fig. 478). This design motif did not disappear later, either, being retained right up to the 20th century, when it is seen in the ornamentation of ethnographic textiles (see, for example, Latviešu tautas tērpi, 2003, Fig. 154, p. 82; Fig. 183, p. 91, etc.).

In Roman Period designs, an arrangement of four dotted rhombuses has so far not been found. However, it is possible that the single rhombus motif represented in this period is a simplification of a more complex arrangement having the same semantic significance (compared Ambroz, 1965, p. 16–18). It seems that the occurrence of perforations in the rhombuses of some wheel pins may be taken as supporting such an idea (see Šnore, 1930, Fig. II:23).

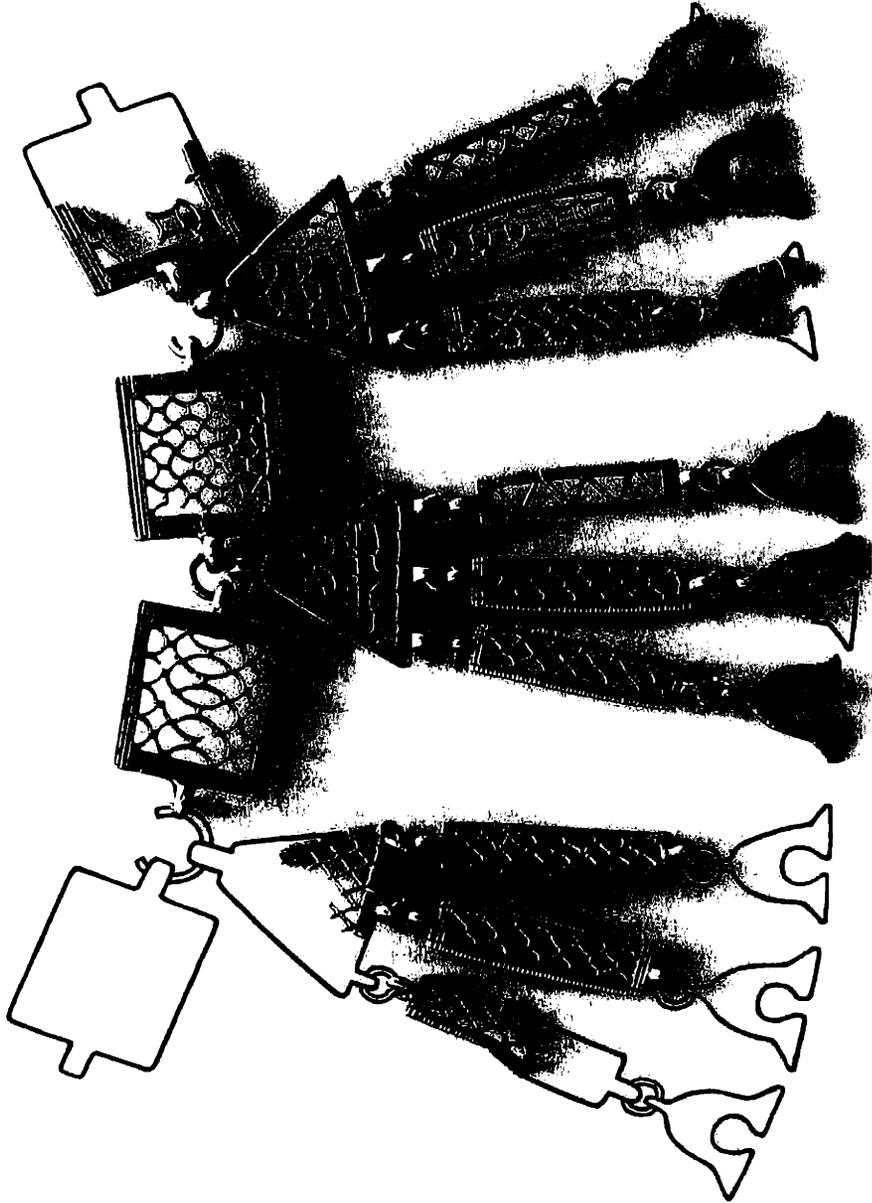
The sun and two rhombic crosses at the apex of the triangle form a united design. Such a combination of the sun as the provider of fertility and rhombuses as fertility symbols in a single composition also has a logical basis from the viewpoint of the semantics of both symbols.

The lower part of the triangle is separated from the top part by a straight line, dividing the triangle in two. The lower field contains two animal figures. The animal on the right has a pointed muzzle, curved horns and a short tail, unequivocally identifying it as a goat. The drooping head of the animal on the left, its open mouth, pronounced chest and narrow hips indicate that it is most likely a wolf or dog.

The goat is rarely encountered in metal age zoomorphic depictions, horses, dogs and birds being much more common. Evidently, in this case the goat and the wolf/dog following it reflect some kind of mythological idea. In folklore, the two animals are seen in binary opposition, where the nanny goat falls prey to the wolf:

The white nanny was washing clothes
By the bank of the Daugava;
A wolf jumps out and takes the nanny,
And the clothes remain unwashed.

The goat is in Latvian mythology a symbol of the vegetative force of nature and fertility. These animals were sacrificed in order to promote fertility, and a nanny was sacrificed more commonly than a billy. The Baltic Ger-



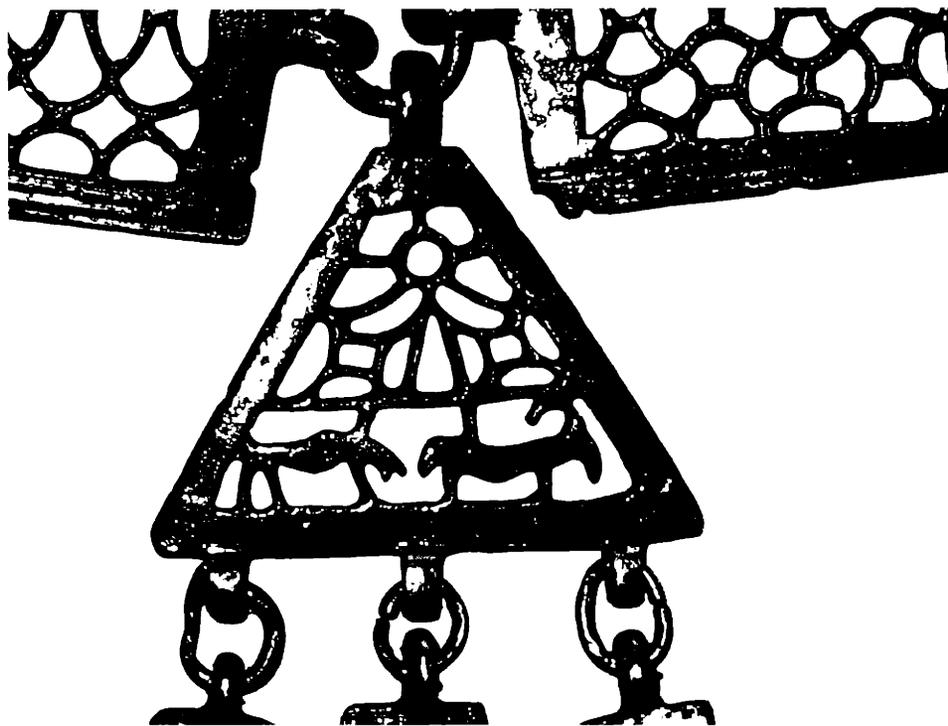


Fig. 2. The central triangle of the ornament.

2 pav. Papuošalo centrīnēs dalīes trikampē plokštelē

man historian Paul Einhorn wrote in 1636 that at Christmas the Latvians sacrificed a nanny to a wolf at a crossroads in order to ensure the benevolence of the wolves and prevent them attacking the stock (Mitoloģijas enciklopēdija, 1994, p. 229). The figure of the nanny goat appears at the Winter Solstice in both Baltic and Slavic agrarian magic: one of the earliest kinds of Christmas mummers' masks was that of the nanny goat. In the southern and central provinces of Russia in the late 19th and early 20th century, a widespread Christmas game was that of leading the nanny goat, the symbolic slaughter of the goat and its coming to life again (Etnografiā vostočnyh slavān, 1987, p. 450). It was also believed that the nanny goat could influence meteorological events:

Yesterday the nanny goat was washing clothes
By the bank of the deep river:
Will there be rain, will there be snow,
Or will it be followed by frost? (34101)

The wolf appears in Latvian mythology as the opposite of the nanny goat, symbolising frozen nature. December is known accordingly as the 'Wolf Month'. In the cosmology of the Latvians and other northern peoples, the wolf circles around the sun, seeking to devour it. In order to prevent this, a bloody sacrifice must be made to the wolf – the nanny goat already mentioned (Mitoloģijas enciklopēdija, 1994, p. 228). There are many more beliefs concerning the wolf than there are about goats. One such belief has it that wolves are God's dogs. When they howl, they are praying, or else God is feeding them (Šmits, 1941, p. 1991).

The binary opposition of the wolf and goat is most closely connected with the winter solstice. This is expressed very clearly in a Christmas game. The participants in the game stand in a circle holding hands. A girl, the 'goat', stands inside the circle, while a boy, the 'wolf', stands outside the circle. Singing songs, the people circle in one

direction and then another. The wolf, seeking to catch the goat, runs around the outside of the circle and, when he comes to a 'gate' made by two people holding hands, asks: "What gate is this?" The reply is: "A cattle gate", "A sheep gate", "A pig gate", etc., by which the wolf gains no access. Finally, he finds a 'wolf gate' and rushes in. The goat, fleeing from the wolf, is allowed to leave the circle by any of the gates. Finally, the wolf catches the goat. He sings:

The wolf killed the nanny goat
In a little willow bush.
(LD, 1922, p. 236–237).

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KRŪTINĒS PAPUOŠALAS IŠ KALNAZĪVERTI: ARCHEOLOGIJA IR TAUTSAKA

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Santrauka

1971 m. ariamoje dirvoje prie Kalnazīverti vienkiemio (Liepojos r.) buvo aptikta keletas III a. žalvarinių papuošalų, tarp jų ir ažiūrinio krūtinės papuošalo fragmentų. Vėliau darytų archeologinių tyrinėjimų metu buvo rasta dar keletas fragmentų. Tai leido rekonstruoti papuošalą. Krūtinės papuošalas susideda iš keturkampių ir trikampių ažiūrinų plokštelių, sudėliotų trimis „aukštais“. Apačioje yra pusbėnulis pavidalo kabučiai. Plokštelėms būdingas geometrinis ornamento stilius. Vienintelė išimtis – centrinis trikampis, kuriame pavaizduotas siužetas. Trikampio viršuje yra saulė

We can only guess whether suchlike ritual games actually took place at the time when the pectoral ornament was made. However, it is by no means impossible: lines of people holding hands in some kind of ritual procession or dance are shown on the well-known openwork spacer plate from Stragna, dated to the same period (Ģinters, 1963, p. 219–220; Fig. 6).

Folklore reflects mythological ideas from various periods, including very ancient times, but the time of origin of such ideas is almost impossible to establish. The image in the central triangle of Kalnazīverti pectoral ornament is one of the rare examples permitting the identification of the time of existence of one such mythological story.

su šešiais spinduliais, o po ja – du rombiniai kryžiai. Abu simboliai labai paplitę romėniškojo laikotarpio baltų ornamentikoje ir simboline prasme susiję su vaisingumo užtikrinimu.

Apatinė trikampio dalis ryškiai atskirta nuo viršutinės tiesia linija (dvejų pasaulių – dangiškojo ir žemiškojo – vaizdins?). Po šia linija trikampio pagrinde pavaizduoti du gyvūnai: ožka (ožys?) ir už jos einantis vilkas. Ožka (jei tai ji) metalų epochoje buvo vaizduojama labai retai. Dažniau buvo vaizduojamas arklys, paukštis arba šuo. Greičiausiai

mūsu atvejū ožka ir vilkas atspindi tam tikrā mitoloģinī siužetā. Latviu tautosakoje abu ģyvūnai yra binarinēje opozīcijojē – ožka tampa vilko grobiu. Ožkos ir vilko opozīcija glaudžiai susijusi su žīemos ekvinokcījos agrariniais rituais. Tai ļabai aišķiai pastebīma Kalēdū žaidīmuosē, kuriuosē ožka (merģina) stengiasī pabēgti nuo vilko (vaikīno),

bet vilkas vis dēlto jā paveja. Tautosaka atspindi mitoloģinius īvairiū, tarp jū ir ļabai senū epochū vaizdīnius. Nustatyti jū atsiradīmo laikā beveik neįmanoma. Centrinio krūtīnēs papuošalo trikampio vaizdīnys – vienas īs nedaugelio atvejū, leidžiančiū sukretinti vieno īs tokiū mitoloģinī siužetū buvimo laikā.

Īteikta 2005 m. spalio mėn.