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## Quadian bone and antler industry from Slovakia (1. - 5. century AD)

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## ABSTRACT

In this Article, I am going to deal with the finds of bone and antler industry in the Germanic-Quadi environment of southwestern Slovakia. They include jewellery, combs, toilet items, items used for textile and leather working, knife handles, parts of board games and semi-finished products. They have been found on both cemeteries and settlements. Germanic tribes worked bones and antler using almost the same techniques as the Romans. These included mostly coarse cutting, soaking and moulding the material into shapes by lathing, sawing, drilling, grinding, polishing, smoothing, riveting, chiseling and so on. Comparing the structure of the studied items with those from the territory of Bohemia, which was settled by the Germanic tribes of the Marcomanni, we notice certain differences. As for jewellery, we have a greater variety of forms bone hairpins. They include also various kinds of amulets, a larger number of drilled animal teeth and bone pearls. In the Marcomannic space we find a larger number of bone gaming pieces, rod dice, fishing tools, various catheters, and a wide range of single-sided and double-sided combs. When we compare the structure of bone and antler products with the finds from the Roman Empire (particularly Pannonia), we can see also clear differences. There is a wider typological range of hairpins; there have been found various parts of furniture, weaving items (spindle whorls, weaving tablets, etc.), gaming pieces, parts of military equipment, various kinds of amulets, writing tools, whistles, and so on.

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## 1. Introduction

The first tribes of the Suebian Quadi started to arrive in the area of today's Slovakia soon after the beginning of our era. They settled down mainly in south-western Slovakia (Map 1). The area north of them continued to be settled by people of the Púchov culture, while in the south of eastern Slovakia remnants of the Celtic-Dacian population survived. At the end of the Early Roman period, and particularly in its later phase, the Quadi population spread also northwards and eastwards. In northern and northeastern Slovakia, the Púchov culture was replaced by the North-Carpathian group, while the southeast became settled by Vandal tribes (Pieta 1982, 1991, 376–387; Lamiová-Schmiedlová 1992, 75–79; Prohászka 2006; Kolník 2012, 231–236).

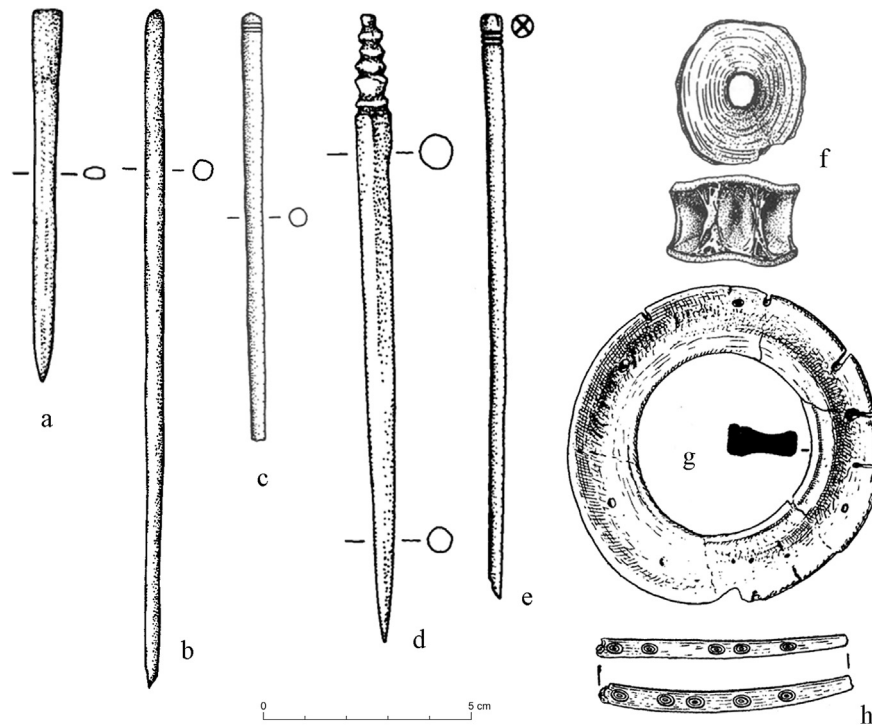
In my Article, I am going to deal with the finds of bone and antler industry in the Germanic-Quadi environment of southwestern Slovakia.

## 2. Bone and antlerworking techniques in the Germanic environment, and the Germanic workshops

Germanic tribes worked bones and antler using almost the same techniques as the Romans. These included mostly coarse cutting, soaking and moulding the material into shapes by lathing, sawing, drilling, grinding, polishing, smoothing, riveting, chiseling and so on. Tools used for bone and antlerworking were similar to those used for woodworking, and likely identical to the tools used in the Roman provinces, such as various saws, files, drills and knives. However, such tools have practically not been identified among the finds from Slovakia. The only preserved tool of this kind is an iron item from Stupava in the form of a bar with a fork-shaped end, which may have been used for decoration by concentric rings (Hrnčiarik, 2014b, 155).

Most of the bone used came from cattle, pigs, sheep and poultry, but also wild animals such as wolves, bears and deer. In Central Europe, decorative hairpins and combs were mostly made of antler from stags, roebucks and probably also from fallow deer. Teeth from animals such as dogs, wolves, bears and wild boars were also worked and used as amulets. Drinking horns came mostly from cattle and European bison. The horns have not been preserved on

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Map 1. Germanic-Quadi Territorium.

the studied area, but an indirect proof of their occurrence are the finds of bronze mounts. For this reason, I did not include drinking horns in my presentation (for Example: Kolník, 1980, 98).

We have proofs of bone and antlerworking from the whole of the Roman period, but unlike in the Roman Empire, antler is predominant here. Numerous finds of semi-finished products were also found in Slovakia, for example in structure 52/96 in Nitra-Chrenová on the locations Shell and Baumax (Březinová, 2003, 31), and in Bratislava-Vajnory on the location Pri Visáku (Varsík, 2011b, Tab. 64). They are a clear evidence of domestic production in the Quadi settlements. The products were mostly simple artefacts, occasionally made in all households and intended for own consumption. However, so far we haven't localised a specialised workshop for production of combs, jewellery or other items made of these two materials.

Evidence of specialised workshops, particularly those producing combs, is plentiful in Barbaricum. For example in Romania, one workshop with a local un-Roman worker was found on the site Valea Seacă. It was a sunken-featured hut, which contained fragments of semi-finished products and antler waste, but also ceramic containers used for soaking of antler, and a fireplace which probably served for bending and straightening of antler (Musteata and Popa, 2010, 160). One of the workshops west of Slovakia which produced bone rod dices has been localised in Praha-Hoštice (Zeman, 2001, 108). A workshop producing combs has been found in Zlechov (Zeman, 2006, 457).

In the late antiquity, the production of bone, and particularly antler artefacts (mainly combs) became an important part of the economy of probably each Germanic settlement. The export of antler or finished products to the Roman Empire meant a significant financial betterment for many Germanic people (Hrnčiarik, 2015, 21).

I would like to point out that in Slovak archaeological writings, bone often figures as material, but that does not always reflect reality. This is because so far, these objects have not been submitted

to a detailed analysis. As far as I can tell, the objects are mostly made of antler.

### 3. Structure of bone and antler finds on the Quadi area

A wide range of artefacts used in various areas of daily life were made of bone and antler. They have been found on both cemeteries and settlements. Since the excavated Germanic graves are mostly cremation graves, most of the finds are fragments, and only few of them have been interpreted correctly. They form a specific group of objects which served as grave accessories. In the following analysis I classified them into functional groups based on their primary use.

#### 3.1. Jewellery (Fig. 1)

The first group of finds consists of jewellery and includes hairpins, pendants and bracelets. Unlike on the sites in the Roman Empire, these finds do not represent the most numerous group. Dominant among them are hairpins, which can be divided into two main groups:

The first group consists of undecorated bone hairpins without heads (Fig. 1a–c), and with the body gradually narrowing towards the tip. In rare cases, the body is reinforced in the middle. Unlike on the items produced within territory of the Roman Empire, the body is more often circular in section. It is basically just a worked piece of bone with one pointed end. Only occasionally do they have simple decoration on the unpointed end (for instance the find from Branč; Kolník et al., 2007, Tab. 76). They were probably also used for fastening clothes together, applying colour on eyelashes and eyebrows, and in hairdressing. They occur throughout the Roman period.

The second group consists of hairpins with heads (Fig. 1d). T. Zeman, who examined the finds of bone and antler industry from the territory of today's Bohemia, tried to make a chronological classification of types based on the shape of their heads (Zeman,

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