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## About the ways of wearing of one-edged swords in the Przeworsk and the Oksywie culture

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### ABSTRACT

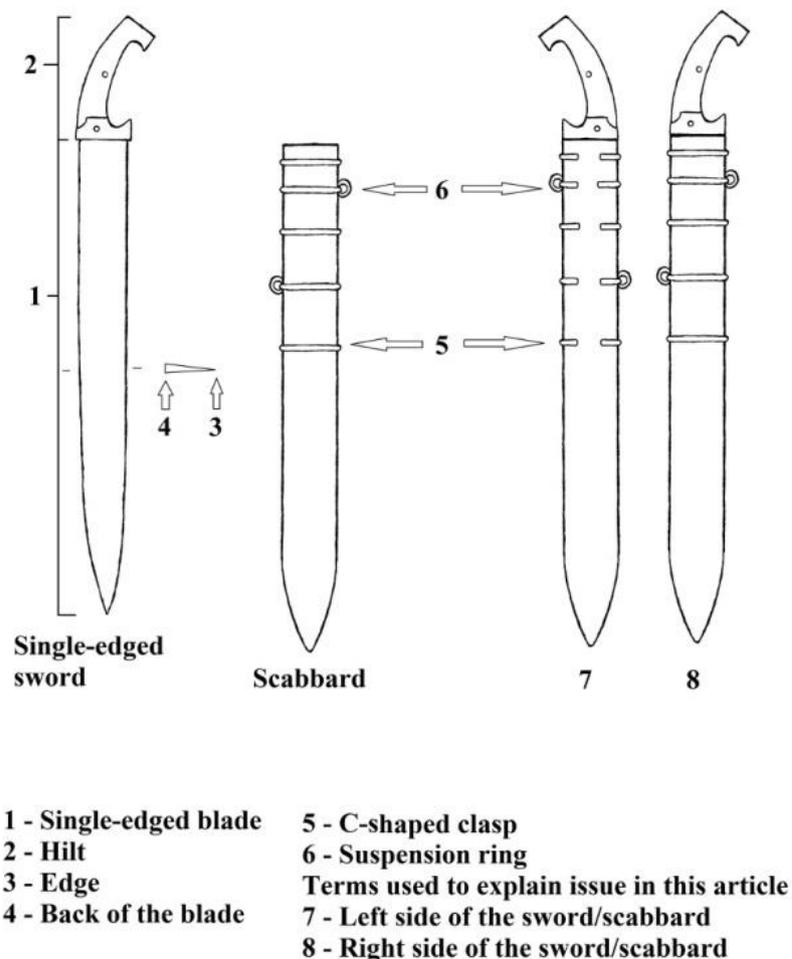
Sword is one of the most important identifiers of elite character of the burial in the Przeworsk Culture. The way of wearing double-edged sword is determined by scabbard slide and strap that passes through the slide. The side on which the sword was worn is also incontrovertible. More complicated dilemma can be observed while working on the interpretation of one-edged swords and their suspension system. In some cases there are preserved scabbard clasps and mounts still attached to the blade. This could happen when grave inventory was burnt together with sword hidden in its carrying case. By analysing the placement of the suspension rings with attached strap, we can get answers to such questions as: which side of the body was worn particular sword, what was its inclination towards the body and how high it was suspended. The sole interpretation of research results could give us incomplete view of the past. Running some tests with reconstructed artefacts could significantly influence and change final conclusions regarding analysed archaeological material.

**Keywords:** ancient weapon, the Przeworsk culture, the Oksywie culture, experimental archaeology, one-edged sword

### INTRODUCTION

Such archaeological cultures like the Przeworsk culture were dominating in the central part of the barbarian Europe, as well as the Oksywie culture, which was visible in an archaeological material on Pomerania. The Przeworsk culture occupied a great part of

contemporary Polish territories. The chronological frame of this question is associated with 2nd century BC marked as A2 phase of pre-roman period, to the first half of 2nd c. AD marked as B2 phase of roman period and regard of it, it is an accumulating of the occurrence of one-edged swords in the sepulchral material in this time. In another phases, for both cultures, the amount of the mentioned type of weapon is negligible. The main identifier of rich warrior burials, was sword. Double-edged weapon mainly consist of imports and local imitation in the case of late roman spatha [1,2]. In terms of one-edged blade specimen we are dealing with native product of craftsmen from the Przeworsk and the Oksywie culture. The lack of earlier developed traditions, concerning the way of wearing mentioned above type of armament, and a deficiency in the existence of prototypes in another parts of Barbaricum, could result in appearing of various new kinds of one-edged sword suspensions. More information could bring us analogies to few finds of one-edged swords from Danish bog in Vimose [3]. It is possible that there are also such deposits on today's Polish territory, however, current research advancement does not allow to draw further conclusions [4].



**Figure 1.** Parts of the sword and scabbard.

Source: own preparation

Further considerations on this subject should start with a brief characteristics of one-edged sword's and scabbard's parts, which is necessary in order to widely analyse the issue of wearing one-edged sword. Scabbard's metal elements preserved on the blade are usually in shape of oval band. Because of their shape they are called "C-shaped clasps. Their object was to additionally connect two halves of scabbard made of an organic material. Most likely, one-edged swords were used with a wooden scabbards. Leather scabbard was too flexible even after preserving it with a beeswax. Suspension rings are a specific form of ferrules (Figure 1).

They have circles on one side, which enables attaching suspension straps [5]. For further analysis, it is essential to specify the side on which scabbard clasps have their gaps. To do so, it is necessary to distinct right from left side of scabbard. The article assumes that the scabbard's side will be determined by looking at the rear of the sword directed to the recipient and scabbard opening upward.

The discussion concerning the details of armament associated with elite burial inventory, should begin with the presentation of statistics related to its occurrence in burials with armaments in the Przeworsk and the Oksywie culture. The intensity of the occurrence of single-edged weapons in today's Polish territories can be observed at the beginning of phase A2, where the percentage of one-edged swords in the graves with the armament of the Przeworsk culture is 9.1%, while in the Oksywie culture reaches 26.66% [6]. In phase A3, the difference between the frequency of single-edged swords in the graves of warriors of both cultures has decreased. The relatively large amount of this weapon in Pomerania could have contributed to the faster development of the form of the blade itself and the way it was worn. In the last phase in which the Oksywie culture was functioning in Pomerania, before the displacement by the culture of the Wielbark, the percentage of one-edged swords in graves containing weapons was 21.19%, while in the Przeworsk culture it went up to 11.6% [6]. The expansions of the foreign factor at the turn of the century erupted into the area of Pomerania, causing a destabilization of the local substrate, resulting in the disappearance of the funeral rite in which the deceased warrior was buried with his armament.

The beginning of the Roman period in the Przeworsk culture was characterized by a strong increase in the share of single-edged swords to 17.9% [7]. Then there is a decrease in the occurrence of one-edged swords in graves, which is already 13.8% in phase B2a, while in B2b only 2.9%.

## **PRE-ROMAN PERIOD**

Not all single-edged swords found in pre-Roman graves are suitable for analysis. The basic criterion is the presence of suspension rings on the burned blade. In the case of separate assembly of the scabbard ferrules and sword hardware, it is not possible to draw conclusions about their original position relative to the scabbard.

In the Oksywie culture, the analysis should be extended by three double-edged swords equipped with single-edged ferrules. In the grave No. 67 from the site in Rumia, the above mentioned precedent can be observed [8]. The suspension rings were not found on the blade, so the interpretation of the manner of wearing a demonstrated sword is not possible. The artefact found in tomb No. 4 from Rządź brings more information. There are two suspension rings on the bent blade, located in a way that makes it possible to attach straps on each side of the blade [9]. The last of the three mentioned is a sword from the grave No. 60 from Chełmno [9] Suspension rings preserved on the weapon allow to draw further conclusions. The most

intriguing is the location of circles of the suspension rings placed on one side of the blade. This arrangement is unique in comparison with other swords in the Oksywie and the Przeworsk culture. Taking into account the cases mentioned above, there can be no reason to unquestionably determine how to wear a one-edged sword, as they are most likely a local way to deal with the lack of a scabbard sword characteristic of Celtic designs, or modelled on them.

Proper consideration on how to wear a single-edged weapon is the analysis of the specimens, on which the blade has retained its suspension rings. One such example is the sword from the tomb No. 1 in Chełmno [9]. The upper ferrule, located just below the hilt, was pointing toward the back of the blade, while the joints holding the fitting of the scabbard were on the side of the edge, which did not unambiguously implicate the side of the body on which it was worn. The lower ferrule, of the same design, was closer to the center of the blade and facing the opposite side than the first one. Another sword from the same site, equipped with strap fitting is a specimen from the grave No.149 [9]. As in the previous case, here also the upper suspension ring is just below the hilt bar and is pointing toward the back. The lower ferrule could have been substituted with a strap of organic material, or the suspension ring had occurred primary but didn't preserve.

The burials where the scabbard elements were found, but not on the blade of the sword, can be seen in Pruszcz Gdański [10]. There is only one ferrule in the grave No. 71A, and some fragments of C-shaped clasps. Unfortunately, it cannot be determine where on the scabbard, ferrule was originally placed. The sword which was excavated in burial No. 269, was entombed with a pair of ferrules used for straps. Additionally, the ferrules arms are pointed to the opposite side than the suspension rings, which indicates that sheathed one-edged sword could have been worn either on the left or right side of the wearer's body. In the grave no. 303 was found a single suspension ring. Unfortunately, the level of destruction and diameter of the suspension rings, which does not match the width of sword's blade, makes it very hard to conclude anything. The last two burials, equipped with single-edged weapons, numbered 404 and 492, contained two ferrules, each. In both cases the arms of the clasps end up on one side, which may indicate a particular wearing position on the side of the body. Precise definition is not possible due to the separate entombment of the sword and the scabbard elements in the burial place.

In the cemetery in Rumia we also deal with a burial equipped with a single-edged sword and two ferrules, numbered 20 [8]. Only one strap fitting was preserved well enough to determine the joint position of the arms in front of the suspension rings.

Excavations in Wygoda site [11] resulted in the discovery of two graves with single-edged swords and ferrules. Tomb No. 74 had one suspension ring. The author's interpretation suggests its location just below the hilt and pointing towards the blade. Burial No. 75 contained a sword and scabbard elements, including two ferrule. According to the author of the publication, the upper fitting was pointing towards the blade and the bottom in the opposite direction. The gap between the arms of the ferrule was interpreted on the left side of the weapon, which would indicate wearing the sword on the right side of the body.

In the Przeworsk culture in the pre-Roman period we have only a few examples of swords with preserved ferrules on the blade. In the grave No. 156 of Kamienczyk [12] dating to the A3 stage, the sword was equipped with one ferrule, placed closest to the hilt from among other fittings. It had also ring which was facing the blade and the gap between the arms of the fitting placed on the right side of the scabbard. The most convenient situation has

occurred in the contents of grave No. 53a from Oblin [13] dating back to A3. There are 8 fittings on the sword's blade, including two ferrules. Upper pointed towards the edge and lower pointed towards the back of the blade. The gap between the arms of the fittings was placed on the left side of the scabbard, which determines the wearing of the sword on the right side of the body. These elements had been moved, so we cannot be sure of their original position. However, the appearance of two C-shaped fittings above the upper rim may suggest a relatively low position of the upper loop to attach the belt, in comparison to other artefacts. This position results in placing hilt further away from the body. In case of wearing a blade on the right side of the chest, with a grip sticking out from the body, pulling out a weapon becomes a lot easier. Another well preserved example of a sword with scabbard elements is the grave No. 24 from Siemiechow [14] dating back to A3. Unlike Oblin's exemplar, here we are dealing with a gap between the arms of the fittings on the right side of the sword. You can say that this weapon was worn on the left side. The upper ferrule was pointing towards the edge and the bottom toward the back of the blade.

Further analysis concerning the wearing of single-edged swords on the basis of scabbard elements in the Przeworsk culture in the pre-Roman period is based on the interpretation of findings containing separate deposition of weapons and fittings. In burial marked no. 298 in Oblin near the sword, were found two ferrules among others. Another example is the grave No. 323 of Kamiencyk, dating back to A2 [12]. It contained two poorly preserved ferrules. The most important finding is the unique system for attaching straps to the scabbard, which can be a response to their quantity. The classic ferrule is fitted with an additional ring to which the sheet metal fittings are attached to allow the belt to be fastened. The last site to mention is Wesolki [15]. Tombs numbered 51 and 53 included one-edged swords and scabbards elements. In the first burial, only one ferrule was found, with its arms converging on the side. The second included two fittings for belt fastening, and their design was the same as in the previous find.

## **PERIOD OF ROMAN INFLUENCE**

Demonstrating how to wear one-edged sword brings many problems. The cremation burial rite caused the burning of the organic elements of the sword's scabbards, so that the C-shaped clasps and the suspension rings could slide off from the blade, after taking out the burned sword from the stack, and thus prevent further interpretation. Certain types of ferrules had separate rings threaded on C-shaped clasps, which were clinched at the time of application from the bottom to the expanding scabbard. Separation of these two elements makes it difficult to understand further, the way a particular sword was worn. Examples are graves no. 97 and 341 from Kamiencyk, they are dated to the phase B1. One of found there C-shaped clasps is provided with a ring, and also there is a separate ring, that originally could have been a scabbard component. The same burial site analogy is the grave dated to B2a, numbered 320, in which one of the fittings also had a threaded ring with a specific bulge ornament, and the second ring was found separately [12]. In this case there is no doubt about the individual elements of the scabbard. The appearance of one suspension ring for attaching the scabbard support strap can also be observed in grave 44A from the position of the Nadkole 2 [16]. In this case, we also deal with profiled rings, as in the case of grave No. 320 of Kamiencyk [12]. Sadly, on the Nadkole 2 site in the material of the grave 44A, there was another suspension ring whose link to the scabbard is doubtful, due to its very small diameter,

and the lack of decorations. Similar stylistics, methods of decorations, a short distance from both sites, and dating within the boundaries of phase B2 may be evidence that both swords were made by the same craftsman. With such an assumption it was also possible that the second suspension ring primarily was present in the grave No. 44A of Nadkole. At the Siemiechow site, in the grave no. 44, dating back to the B2 phase, scabbard fittings were found as well [14]. The ring was on the C-shaped fitting just below the hilt, from the back of the blade. The poor state of conservation of the artefact did not allow us to determine if there was a second suspension ring.

Analysis of the weapon with the preserved elements of the scabbard allowed us to distinguish four basic variants of wearing the sword. In some cases it was also possible to check several versions of the position relative to the body.

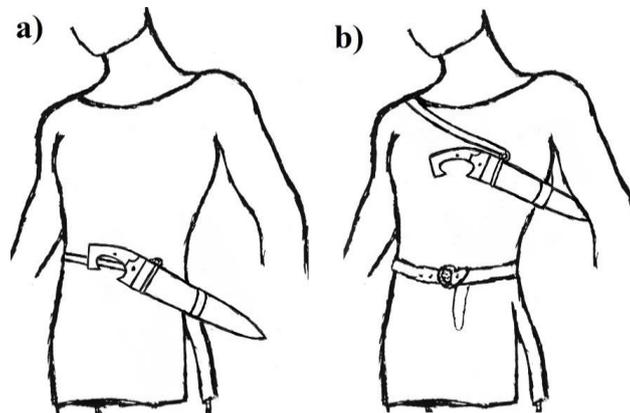
### **OPTION 1.**

The first case includes a scabbards with only one suspension ring which was placed near the opening, faced towards the back of the sword. Junction of the fittings is in this case on the blade side or on the right side of the scabbard. Lower ferrule was not registered. This could be the result of usage of an organic materials. Placement of the ferrules may suggest the possibility of placing the sword both to the right and left side of the wearer's body.

A) Significant tilt may indicate that the sword is fastened around the waist, with a pulling strap on the same side as the suspension ring, placed approximately half the way up the scabbard.

B) The use of the lower strap facing the blade determines the possibility of being worn with the support on the torso, whereby the sword is located in the vicinity of the chest with the point directed downward and extended towards the armpit. In the case of a gap in the fittings on the right side of the sword, the possibility of wearing it on the left side is more likely since the ends of the fittings are not always parallel with each other. Wearing a sword in this way puts the sword's hilt away from the body.

### **EXAMPLE:**



**Figure 2.** Visualisation of option 1.

Source: own preparation

Chełmno, grave no. 149 - The gap between the arms of the ferrule, on the right side of the sword, proves that it was worn on the left side of the wearer's body.

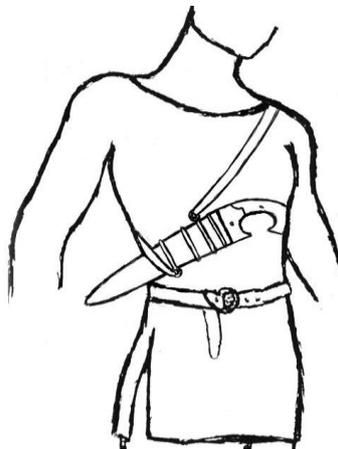
Siemiechów, grave no. 44 - The same situation as the sword of Chełmno indicates the wearing of weapons on the left side of the wearer's body.

## **OPTION 2.**

The second variant is characterized by swords with two suspension rings on the sword's blade. The upper fitting for the strap is directed towards the back, while the bottom towards the edge of the blade. This way determines the more vertical position of the sword than in the variant 1. The hilt is slightly inclined from the body, by placing the upper suspension ring from the back of the blade. In case of such arrangement it is possible to pull the sword from the scabbard with right hand, even though the scabbard was placed either on the right or the left side of the wearer's body.

## **EXAMPLE:**

Chełmno, grave No. 1 – Gaps in the fittings located opposite the suspension rings in the ferrules, makes it possible to wear the sword on the right or on the left side of the wearer's body.



**Figure 3.** Visualisation of option 2.

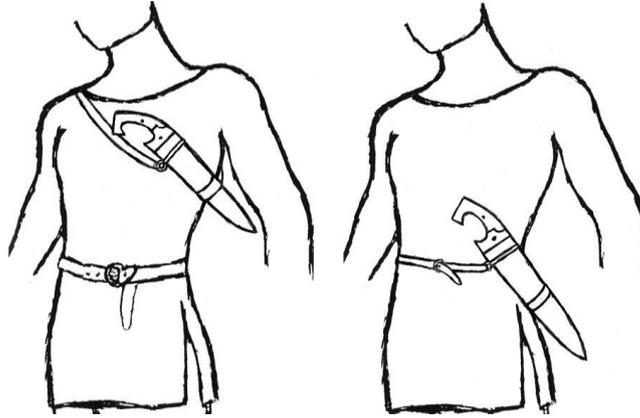
Source: own preparation

## **OPTION 3.**

Fastening with one suspension ring placed on the edge side and lower pulling belt, causes a greater inclination of the sword. It is arranged more horizontally in relation to the body than in variant No. 2, and more vertically than in variant No. 1. This type of attachment works well when carried high on the torso. Placing almost under right or left armpit, makes it convenient to pull out the sword with the right hand. This system of suspension allows also to wear a sword around the waist.

**EXAMPLE:**

Tombstones No. 156 - The endings of the fittings arms are located on the right side of the scabbard, which determines the original position of the sword on the left side of the body.

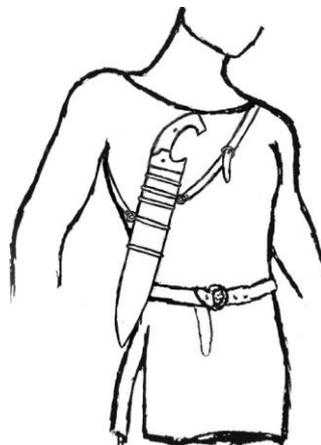


**Figure 4.** Visualisation of option 3.  
Source: own preparation

**OPTION 4.**

The last variant includes sword scabbards fitted with a pair of ferrules to fasten the belts. The upper ferrule is directed towards the back of the sword. From all of the above-mentioned wearing methods, this one is characterized by almost vertical way of wearing in relation to the body. As in previous cases, pulling the sword out with right hand does not create a problem, regardless of the body's side on which the sword is placed.

**EXAMPLE:**



**Figure 5.** Visualisation of option 4.  
Source: own preparation

Siemiechów's tomb no. 24 - Gaps in the fittings are placed on the right side of the sword which concludes the way of wearing it on the left side of the body (possibly left-handed, with the sword on the left side of the chest).

Oblin Tomb No.53a - The ends of the ferrules' arms are located to the left of the scabbard, which determines the original position of the sword on the right side of the body.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

Performed analysis demonstrate that the position of suspension rings has great impact on the way one-edged sword is worn. Most examples of suspension systems do not affect the possibility of drawing the sword from the scabbard with left or right hand. Only Option number 4 makes it difficult to pull the sword out with the left hand, when it is located on the right side of chest vice versa. However, the demonstrated variety in the location of the sword comes to a conclusion that we can talk about three positions on the body with varying degrees of inclination, depending on the suspension rings position. Both the material analysis and the tests performed on the reconstruction of the described weapon showed, that in the case of a right-handed person, the possibility of wearing the sword could be on the right or left side of chest when the hilt was directed to the left side of the body. The sword drawn in this way would move over the user's head. Another way would be to place the sword under the right or left armpit, which allows to pull it out with right or left hand, regardless of the placement either on the right or the left side of the wearer's body. The last variant, concerns the way of wearing a sword at the waist, but is only valid for variants 1 and 3, where the pulling belt is clumped on the scabbard. Unfortunately, there is no certainty that in these cases, the lower suspension ring did not actually occur. It may have disappeared during the transport of the inventory from the burning place to the grave, or in the case of simpler fittings equipped with a moving ring, the loss of it, and as a result we would have only C-shaped clasp, which was originally a suspension ring. By assuming this, one can safely say that the most common way of wearing a single-edged sword in the Przeworsk and the Oksywie culture was to place it at chest or under armpit. The La Tène sword was worn on the right side of the body, most likely due to the use of a large shield and a long sword in close fight, which would be difficult to pull out with right hand if it would be on the left side of the body. The transition of the La Tène right side suspension system to the Przeworsk and the Oksywie culture, (heavily influenced by Celtic culture), and using it to carry single-edged weapons, seems to be proper conclusion. In sum. Reconstruction of such a difficult issue can only be possible when we bring together interpretation of archaeological finds, weapon analysis and the use of experimental archaeology. In this case, theoretical study has been complemented with tests of a reconstructed artifact. Combining theory and practice is the only way to gain reliable conclusions.

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