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From Prosperity to Oblivion: The Slavic Settlement at Gaarz in Ostholstein

ABSTRACT

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On several occasions during the 20th c. archaeological finds were brought to light at Gaarz. A great part of the finds from this site in Ostholstein (Germany) hints at a Slavic settlement there. During surveys with the metal detector from the year 2012 onwards, a steadily growing mass of metal finds was uncovered. Some of these are of high quality and attest to wealth which exceeds the scope of merely rural settlements. In this paper some of the archaeological material is presented and the function of this “new” site in the vicinity of the central place of Starigard/Oldenburg is discussed.

Keywords: West Slavs, Oldenburger Graben, metal detecting, central place, Scandinavia, Early Middle Ages

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I. Introduction

The site Gaarz is situated in the Ostholstein district in Schleswig-Holstein (Germany) and forms a part of the Göhl municipality (Fig. 1). From this place it is only about eight kilometres to Oldenburg in Holstein, a medieval town and renowned major Slavic site also known by its Slavic name “Starigard”. During the Early and High Middle Ages Starigard/Oldenburg formed the political, economic and religious centre of the region and it is believed that several Slavic princes resided there (Gabriel 1988; Gabriel 1991, 76, 80–83).

At Gaarz an aristocratic estate is known to have existed from late medieval times onwards (Oldekop 1908, 51). The manor is situated on a peninsula in the wetlands of the Oldenburger Graben (Fig. 2), a 0.2 to 3.8 km wide and 23 km long (glacial) valley separating the northern

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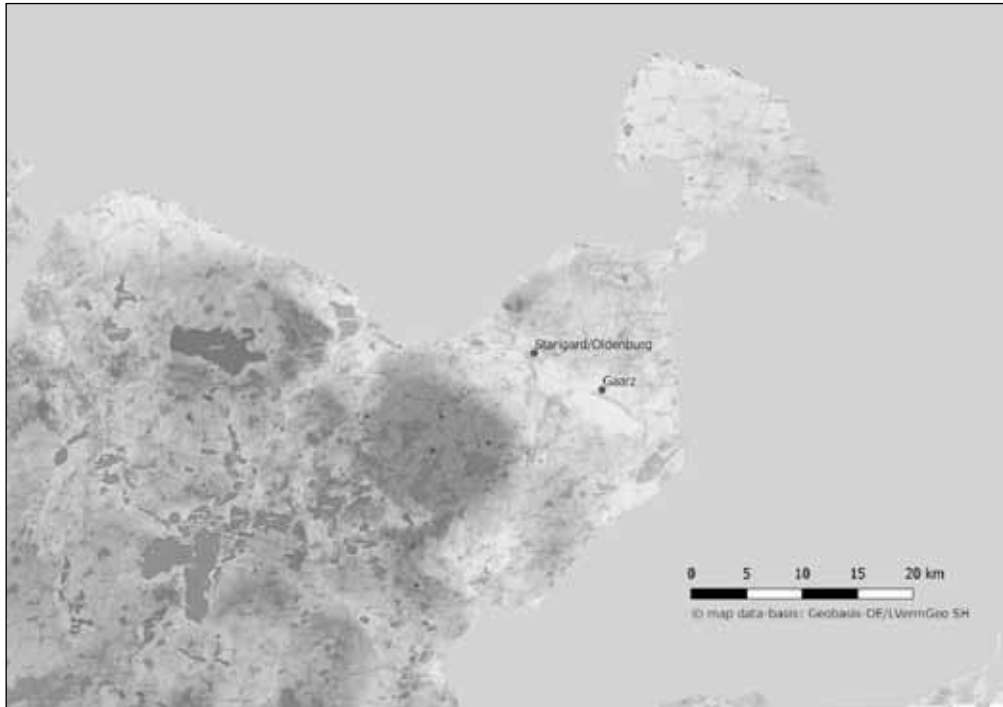


Fig. 1. Location of Gaarz within Ostholstein (Graphic processing by D.F. Hölscher)

part of the Wagrian peninsula from the south (Hoffmann 2004, 9–12; Jakobsen 2004, 5). Until the early 20th c. the property lay directly on the shores of Lake Gaarz. However, together with other surface waters of the eastern Oldenburger Graben, the lake was drained in the 1930s (Venus 2004, 33). Today the former manor has been transformed into a holiday farm and riding centre (cf. Website Gut Gaarz). Yet, the place's name is of Slavic origin and hints at the existence of a fortification (Struve 1959, 75). This supposed Slavic fortress might be hidden underneath the recent buildings, which are placed in a circular pattern around the courtyard (cf. Huckle 1964, 17; Meinhardt 2013, 84f.).

Archaeological material from Gaarz was reported already during the early 19th c. (Ortsakten 1835). As these finds are lost and descriptions in the sources are rather vague, their classification is no longer possible. Surveys during the 1950s and 1960s produced Slavic potsherds southwest and northwest of the former manor houses (ALSH FM 1992/180; Huckle 1964, 12–16) and during the 1990s a great abundance of finds

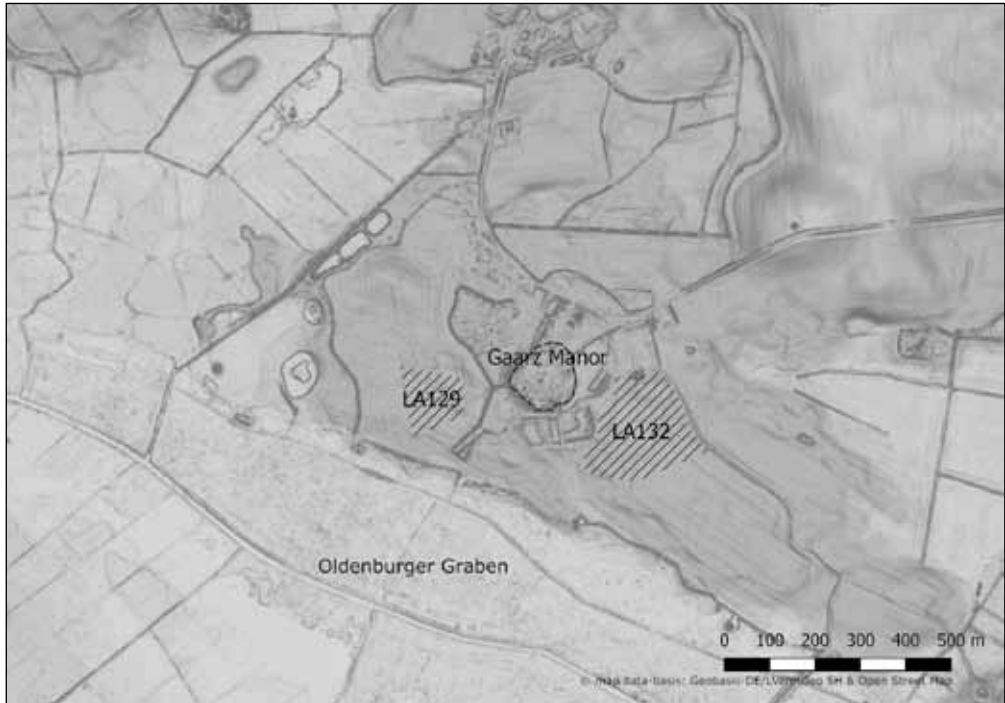


Fig. 2. Location of archaeological sites at Gaarz (Graphic processing by D.F. Hölscher)

was added after the demolition of an apple plantation. In this context archaeological material was also recovered from an area to the south-east (ALSH FM 1992/180; ALSH FM 2002/15). Besides Slavic pottery this material included animal bones, antlers, some metal finds and burnt clay. The areas relevant to archaeology are listed by the state's archaeological heritage authorities, the Archäologisches Landesamt Schleswig-Holstein (ALSH), as archaeological sites LA 129 and LA 132 of the Göhl municipality (Fig. 2).

The first survey with a metal detector was conducted with the consent of the ALSH by the volunteer Michael Nieling in 2012. Amongst the yield were fragments of Islamic coins and of a knife sheath fitting, as well as one fragment of collapsible scales and suitable weights (ALSH SH2012–349). This gave cause for another, more extensive survey administered by the ALSH, carried out during the same year. No metal finds were made to the west and south of the manor (including LA 129), but LA 132 revealed more finds, amongst which were also early

medieval artefacts of Scandinavian origin (ALSH SH2012–356; ALSH SH2012–381). All the following investigations focused on this part of the estate. The rich yield of finds is probably due to the fact that the site was ploughed on a regular basis after the removal of the apple trees and thus artefacts were carried to the surface. It remains unknown to what extent the pasture north of LA 132 holds archaeological information as it was not included in the systematic surveys due to heavy interferences by discarded pieces of recent metal¹.

In 2014 trial excavations led by Stephan Meinhardt (previously ALSH, now Oldenburger Wallmuseum) at LA 132 confirmed the existence of a settlement. The one by two metres small trenches revealed settlement layers, pits and postholes. Yet, almost no datable finds could be associated with these features (ALSH SH2014.72; Stephan Meinhardt, personal communication). However, Slavic pottery from the dug-out material and the filling of one of the pits makes it highly probable that these features belong to the Slavic period.

Until 2014 in total about 248 metal objects were recovered from an area of three hectares. In combination with the older material from the site these finds formed the basis for a master thesis written at Kiel University, handed in in September 2016, from which this paper is derived².

This article presents the “new” site and selected material to an international audience for the first time. At its core stands the question of the Slavic settlement’s function within the region. It is worthwhile mentioning that surveys with the metal detector are being continued and thus new evidence is still being generated.

1.1. What do metal finds from the surface tell us?

For quite some time metal artefacts recovered by means of metal detectors were not commonly accepted as a serious source in archaeology. At least in parts of Northern and Middle Europe this has changed: activities of metal detectorists are being supervised by and integrated into the work of heritage authorities and their finds are now seen as an important means to gain insight into the past (cf. Martens and Ravn

¹ Stephan Meinhardt (Oldenburger Wallmuseum, Oldenburg i. H.; previously ALSH), personal communication.

² The thesis was supervised by Prof. Dr. Ulrich Müller (Kiel) and Prof. Dr. Claus von Carnap-Bornheim (Schleswig), both from the Institute of Pre- and Protohistoric Archaeology at Kiel University; note that neither younger finds, nor more recent literature could be taken into account for this publication.

2016). Only this change of paradigm made the fruitful cooperation between hobby detectorists and heritage authorities possible, which led to the intensified investigations at Gaarz.

While the lack of context constitutes a major issue with finds from the surface, especially from metal detecting, the material does provide important insight into human activity at a site (cf. Klammt 2015, 50; Martens and Ravn 2016; Vogel 1972, 42). Moreover, experiments and observations in the field have shown that connections between finds from the plough horizon and underlying features can be reconstructed (Dobat 2010, 147; Henriksen 2000, 14; Jørgensen 2000, 63–65; Michaelsen 2000, 9).

In respect of chronology, the probability of artefacts from a certain epoch being lost during their use and thus representing a genuine phase of occupation rises with their numbers (Dobat 2010, 179). Moreover, the possibility for chronologically uncertain finds to stem from the same period as the majority of datable artefacts becomes the more probable the more material can be dated to the period in question. As Slavic material dominates the datable finds in Gaarz, it is thus quite probable that most of the chronologically ambiguous or uncertain archaeological material can also be associated with the phase(s) of Slavic occupation. Yet uncertainty in individual cases remains and only well dated features or datable material associated with them could confirm the hypothesis presented here.

1.2. About the chronology of the Slavic Era in Ostholstein

The chronological framework used in this paper follows Carl Schuchhardt's separation of the Slavic Era into three periods representing early, middle and late Slavic times (Kempke 1984, 12–14). For the dating of these periods or phases Kempke's model is used (Gabriel and Kempke 1991, 128–142; Kempke 1984, 59–66, 74–79). It was developed on the basis of material from Ostholstein and thus is perfectly suited for use on the material from Gaarz. The start of the Early Slavic Period is set to the time of Slavic immigration into Ostholstein around 700 AD. The Early Slavic Period lasts well into the 9th c., followed by the Middle Slavic Period covering the late 9th and the 10th c. AD, while the 11th and 12th c. form the Late Slavic Period (Gabriel and Kempke 1991, 128–142; Kempke 1984, 59–66, 74–79; cf. Brather 2008, 40, Tab. 3). Even though overlaps and transition phases occur, parts of the material

culture and settlement patterns differ considerably between these three periods (Brather 2008, 40; Kempke 1984, 12–15).

II. The archaeological material

II.1. The finds

Bone

Early surveys at Gaarz mostly produced bones and pottery. Most of the bones are fragmented or chopped; they seem to be kitchen waste. More specific information on e.g. the composition of the diet cannot be given here, as no further examinations have been carried out on this material yet. A few worked bone objects fit well into the scope of medieval and especially Slavic artefacts. There are at least two bone awls, which were found on the surface, and one bone skate (Biermann 2008, 240–243; Brather 2008, 207; Paddenberg 2012, 50, 94; Schmidt 1989, 41, 44). The latter was found in a settlement-pit during the excavations, but cannot be associated directly with any datable finds.

Pottery

As usual in medieval archaeology, pottery makes up the biggest part of the material found. In the case of Gaarz almost 8 kg of shards could be investigated. The typological classification follows Kempke's work for Ostholstein (Kempke 1984). As the main focus of the author's work was on metal finds, classification could not be carried out in great detail. Yet it is clear that the pottery covers all Slavic periods, with late Slavic material, so called "Gurtfurchenware" (Kempke group G; Kempke 1984, 48–52, 74–79), forming a great part of it. The latter includes shards ornamented with ring and dot decoration, which forms the latest type of Slavic pottery to be found in the region (Kempke 1984, 78; Meier 1993, 1–19). There are a number of shards with ornaments as well, which equal Kempke's group K (Kempke 1984, 40–45, 61–66) and can be dated to the period between about the late 9th and early 11th c. Many shards from Gaarz lack ornamentation though and can thus not be assigned to a specific part of the Slavic Era with certainty (cf. Kempke 1984, 60–65).

Only very few shards of pottery from the site stem from periods before or after Slavic times.



Fig. 3. Residues of metal production from Gaarz (Photo by I. Sommerfeld, Museum für Archäologie Schloss Gottorf, Landesmuseen Schleswig-Holstein)

Residues of metal production

Probably the most important material in connection with the question of the settlement's function are the metal finds. They form a very heterogeneous group of artefacts, but the greatest group within this class of material is made up of 91 fragments of sheet metal and molten pieces (Fig. 3). There are metal bars from the site as well, which might represent ingots. Even though no casting moulds or crucibles were found at the site, these objects are considered to be remnants of the processing of metal at Gaarz, including smelting (cf. Theune 2008, 16–21; Pedersen 2010, 220–257). Most pieces are made from

a copper alloy, though sporadically tin or lead can be found amongst the ingots, and amongst the fragments two remnants of silver are known. Whereas the latter could have been part of a currency in the silver weight economy (cf. Brather 2008, 223–236; Steuer 1987, 460, 459–494; Steuer 1997, 11–13), a drop of molten silver and one copper alloy fragment with remains of molten silver on it may represent the first evidence of silver processing at the site. Concerning the copper alloy, it remains unclear to what extent bronze or brass are represented in the material, as no metallurgical analysis has taken place. Yet, an analysis of material from other early medieval sites in northern Europe has shown a dominance of brass (Pedersen 2010, 233–236, 253–256).

Collapsible scales and weights

As mentioned before, fragments of collapsible scales were amongst the first metal finds brought to light at Gaarz. In total four fragments of such scales, all of them (balance-)arms, were found (Fig. 4). Two of them represent Steuer's type 5 and can be dated to a period from the 10th to the 11th c. (Steuer 1997, 27–29). Of the other two, the first is so worn down that it cannot be further identified, while the second bears resemblance to Steuer's types 6 and 8.1 (Steuer 1997, 29–33, 223–229). However, it cannot be assigned to either of these types. It has an elongated ornamental cube near the folding mechanism and on the basis of this ornament can be dated to the latter half of the 11th c. and the beginning of the 12th c. (cf. Steuer 1997, 29–33, 223–229). Curiously enough, it has no hole where on most similar utensils usually the loop for an attachment of the scales is situated. This last feature might reveal an unfinished product, although balance-arms without loops are known from medieval Schleswig (Steuer 1997, 247–248, Figs. 33, 147) – however, these were made from bone.

With collapsible scales, weights were commonly used and there are eleven artefacts from Gaarz which can be securely identified as weights. Most of these are of an oblate spheroid shape and made of an iron core with a copper alloy coating (for examples see Fig. 4).

Following Steuer's typology (Steuer 1997, 44–51, 290–322, Figs. 15, 232) they can be classified as follows:

- Steuer type B (no further classification possible): 2
- Steuer type B1 (early): 2



Fig. 4. Balances and weights from Gaarz (Photo by I. Sommerfeld, Museum für Archäologie Schloss Gottorf, Landesmuseen Schleswig-Holstein)

- Steuer type B1 (middle): 1
- Steuer type B2: 4

One further oblate spheroid weight shows an ornament of connected dots, which are characteristic of Steuer's type B1 (early). However, these are engraved on a rather small pole, which is a feature common in type B2 (cf. Steuer 1997, 47–48, 320, Figs. 15, 16, 232). This “hybrid” might well be a late representative of type B1 (early), for Steuer assumes a development towards small poles over time (Steuer 1997, 48, 320). This piece might constitute evidence for his assumption that this development started on the southern Baltic coast (*ibid.*).

Other weights from Gaarz show different decorations on their poles as well and these can be connected to classes of weight; a phenomenon that has already been described for various other sites (Paddenberg 2012, 98; Pedersen 2007, 148–155; Steuer 1987, 460; Steuer 1997, 44–51). One

of the type B2 weights even shows four instead of two poles, which is a rather outstanding feature.

Apart from the weights of oblate spheroid shape there is only one item that can safely be classified as a weight for use with collapsible scales. It is a small weight that has the well-known cubo-octahedral shape (Steuer type A; Steuer 1997, 44; cf. Steuer 1987, 460), but in contrast to most other finds of this type it is made of lead. Parallels for this are known e.g. from Kaupang in Norway, where a greater number of lead weights were found (Pedersen 2007, Figs. 6.4, 6.16). Some cylindrical and cubic lead artefacts from Gaarz could be weights as well, but this classification is uncertain.

Indicators of trade and wealth

Both scales and weights occur commonly in central places and especially in Viking age ports of trade or emporia, such as Hedeby, Kaupang, Truso or Birka (cf. Steuer 1997, 11–12; Pedersen 2007). Yet, some finds from open settlements question their use as a marker for central places (cf. Schneeweiß 2011, 82). In the case of Gaarz, however, a lack of archaeological indicators for trade and indeed wealth can be seen in the surroundings. This picture might partly be due to the state of research, but the Oldenburger Graben has long since been the subject of repeated surveys, especially by archaeological volunteers (e.g. Klaus Evers, Oldenburg i.H.). The research during the project “Starigard/Oldenburger Graben – Wolin – Novgorod” (1997–2006; Müller-Wille 1998) did not change the picture of a rather simple lifestyle in the surroundings of Starigard/Oldenburger Graben and thus around Gaarz³. This lack of wealth is manifest not only in the distribution of scales and weights, but also other material. This concerns e.g. beads made from (semi-)precious stones, basalt-millstones from the Eifel-Region and whetstones from Norway (Gabriel 1988, 158–161, 195, Fig. 57; Schön 1989, 186–189; Schön 1995, 101, Fig. 37).

Fragments of both latter materials found at Gaarz show trading contacts with Western and Central Europe and Scandinavia, while two beads (Fig. 5.1–2), one made from rock crystal, the other from carnelian,

³ Based on the information provided by Dr. Dietrich Meier (Akademie der Wissenschaften und der Literatur Mainz, Busdorf), formerly member of the mentioned research project, and Dorothea Feiner (Seminar of Pre- and Protohistory, Göttingen University), who studies material from the excavations conducted by Dr. Meier during that project.



Fig. 5. Beads made from semi-precious stones and objects of Scandinavian origin from Gaarz (Photo by I. Sommerfeld, Museum für Archäologie Schloss Gottorf, Landesmuseen Schleswig-Holstein)

show eastern connections. During the period of the 9th to 11th c. such beads were highly valued goods amongst people on the coasts of the Baltic Sea (Gabriel 1988, 195; Hepp 2007, 16, 83, 87–89, Fig. 30). At least the carnelian example had come a long way from the Caucasus region or even northern India (Gabriel 1988, 195–197; Hepp 2007, 22, 78f.). This could apply to the rock crystal bead as well, but this is uncertain, for it is still a matter of debate whether rock crystal from Scandinavia or Poland was already used during this period (Gabriel 1988, 195–197; Hepp 2007, 22, 78f.).

This evidence of far reaching connections supplemented by the finds of scales and weights indicates trade and exchange at Gaarz and distinguishes this place from most surrounding settlements. In combination with the already discussed residues of the processing of metal, these findings hint at Gaarz being more than a mere rural settlement characterised by agriculture. This notion is strengthened by some valuable metal artefacts, which shall be discussed now and which show the presence of wealthy persons of possibly high social status.

Precious goods – A: Scandinavian connections

The fragment of a Borre-style scabbard chape (Fig. 5.3) is made of a copper alloy and belongs to Sikora group II, type IIa1, which can be dated to the 10th c. (cf. Paulsen 1953, Fig. 53–54; Sikora 2003, 16f., Figs. 3, 10.1–2). The fragment of a second chape from Gaarz (Fig. 5.4), also made from a copper alloy, is difficult to classify due to its state of fragmentation. It might belong to Sikora group I, type Ib with a stylised bird motif (cf. Paulsen 1953, Figs. 26, 30). Sikora 2003, 13–15, Fig. 2). Yet it could also be a fragment of a chape decorated with a simple cross in open-work style, like the one from Vejen in Denmark (Paulsen 1953, 132–136, Fig. 203). Paulsen dates the latter type to the late 11th and the 12th c. (Paulsen 1953, 132–136), while Sikora's type Ib belongs to the second half of the 10th c. and the beginning of the 11th c. (Sikora 2003, 14f.).

In general, scabbard chapes from early and high medieval Europe are rare finds (Brather 2008, 297; Sikora 2003, 11f.). Neither for Starigard/Oldenburg, nor for Old Lübeck or other places in Ostholstein have any finds of this kind been published (cf. Gabriel 1988; Meier 1993, 19–22; Sikora 2003, Figs. 2, 3). At the same time, their rare appearance and high value make it unlikely that such finds would have gone unmentioned. This highlights the exceptional character of the finds from Gaarz. Even though only individual fragments are known so far, the existence of scabbard chapes is a strong indicator of the presence of or connections to the high strata of society during the early and high medieval period. It can, however, not be ruled out that the fragmented state could be a sign of the planned use as raw material in metal processing.

Similar in age and origin to the Borre-style scabbard chape is a Scandinavian style key found at Gaarz (Fig. 5.5). This too is made of a copper alloy. Westphalen classifies keys of similar shape from Hedeby as type 13 (Westphalen 2002, 176, Fig. 80, Plate 67.8). Keys like these were found in some trading places and fortifications in Scandinavia and on the western shores of the Baltic Sea, especially in richly furnished graves of Scandinavian women from the 9th and 10th c. (Cinthio 1998, 230f.; Herrmann 2005, 74f.; Holmqvist and Arrhenius 1961, 159; Roesdahl 1977, 98, 148–151; Schoknecht 1977, 42f.; Westphalen 2002, 176, 182). In Ralswiek (Germany) and Lund (Sweden) they can be traced to the 11th c. (Blomqvist and Martensson 1963, 109, 111–113, 139, Fig. 125; Herrmann 2005, 74f.; for chronology: Herrmann 1996,



Fig. 6. Fragments of a pendant with basket-shaped top from Gaarz (Photo by I. Sommerfeld, Museum für Archäologie Schloss Gottorf, Landesmuseen Schleswig-Holstein and L. Herrmannsen, Archäologisches Landesamt Schleswig-Holstein)

36, Plate 1; cf. Cinthio 1998, 231). Again, this type of artefact is little known in Ostholstein, with only one parallel, which was found at the princely seat of Starigard/Oldenburg (Struve 1985, Fig. 70).

Yet another find of Scandinavian origin occurs in the form of a pendant of the Arnestad-type (Fig. 5.6; Callmer 1989, 21, 37). As it is cast from a copper alloy with a gilded surface, it is one of the most valuable finds from Gaarz. Parallels can be found in Norway, Sweden and Denmark (Callmer 1989, 27, 37; Jørgensen and Pedersen 1996, Fig. 8; Svensson 2001, 244, Fig. 2. U 4523 and U 5604)⁴. The Arnestad-type is not well dated yet, but by the chronology of the sites and parallels in the shape it can be dated to the 10th c., maybe also to the early 11th c. (cf. Callmer 1989, 28–29; Jørgensen and Pedersen 1996, 32–33; Jørgensen 2006, 191; Kleingärtner 2004, 258f.; Svensson 2001, 248f.). To the author's knowledge no other examples but the one from Gaarz are known from the north-west Slavic area. There are indeed only a few artefacts of any similarity in that region.

One further artefact from Gaarz can be associated with the Scandinavian culture of the Early Middle Ages, and it constitutes the most peculiar find from Gaarz. So far, no direct parallels could be found. It is a copper alloy object reconstructed from three fragments: it has the shape of a staff with a basket on top, terminated in a loop (Fig. 6). The basket is formed by four slim, curved bars of the same metal. In total the object is 13.5 cm long. There is only one single pendant published that bears some, albeit faint, similarity. This comes from Janów Pomorski/Truso near the Baltic coast in Poland (Gardeła 2014, 112, Fig. 3.53; Jagodziński 2010, 157). The overall shape of the 5.3 cm object can be described as a staff with a basket and a loop on top as

⁴ Christensen most probably wrongly identified one Danish example from Mysselhøjgård in Lejre as a disc-brooch (Christensen 2016, 515 - Catalogue No. Fig. 137).

well. However, it is rather crude in comparison with the Gaarz example and it lacks resemblance in detail. Gardęła supposes it functioned as an amulet or charm and connects it with Viking age sorcery, classifying it as a miniature *seiðr*-staff (Gardęła 2014, 112f.). Following Price, a *seiðr*-staff was a wand-like utensil for a special kind of Scandinavian magic of the pre-Christian era (Price 2002, 174–203). Price’s interpretation is problematic, as he puts great trust in Old Norse literature as a source for facts concerning a pre-Christian cult, though several hundred years and the Christianisation lie between the composition of these texts and the past they deal with (cf. Meulengracht Sørensen 2001b, 53–56, 59–66, 73; Meulengracht Sørensen 2001a; Mundal 2012, esp. 167–180). Moreover, his interpretation of certain finds as *seiðr*-staves seems too narrow viewed against the fact that there are other possible interpretations, such as distaffs (for examples see Innsbruck University). Nevertheless, the objects for which Price developed his interpretation do show resemblance with the finds from Gaarz and Janów Pomorski/Truso. These much bigger staves are made from iron and about one meter in length. A large number of them possess a basket-shaped top. They were found in rather richly furnished Scandinavian graves from the 8th to the 10th c., some of which contained more unusual objects (Price 2002, 174–203). In spite of the critical position taken here against Price’s classification of these objects, a high symbolic content seems quite possible. Their meaning seems a matter of researchers’ beliefs, though.

The similarity between the copper alloy find from Gaarz and some of these iron staves is striking and thus it might well represent a second, albeit more elaborate, miniature example besides the one from Janów Pomorski/Truso. Its shape, size and the loop at its top make it probable that it was used as a pendant. At the same time the clear separation of the upper and lower part of the staff seems intentional and is puzzling. The clear “cut” might indicate intentional destruction.

Precious goods – B: Slavic jewellery

Signs of wealth at Gaarz do not only come from Scandinavia. Adding to the collection of valuable objects, albeit representing a younger period, are typical Late Slavic jewellery and ornament fittings, most of which are made of a copper alloy. Among these are finger rings (cf. Bach and Dušek 1971; Herrmann 1972; Łęga 1930; Malinowska-Łazarczyk 1982), belt buckles (cf. Heindel 1990; Hartvig 2016; Krabath 2001) and belt



Fig. 7. Slavic jewellery from Gaarz (Photo by I. Sommerfeld, Museum für Archäologie Schloss Gottorf, Landesmuseen Schleswig-Holstein)

hooks (cf. Gabriel 1988; Heindel 1990; Knorr 1970), as well as knife sheath fittings (cf. Biermann 2009; Knorr 1938; Krabath 2001, 69–71) (Fig. 7). They can be dated to the 11th and 12th c. and presumably all of them could have been produced in local workshops. Amongst these objects is also the most precious find from Gaarz: a silver ring (Fig. 7, top far right). Today it is a flat band ornamented with three fields that show punch-marked crosses, each inside a circle. But it was once a ring to be worn on the finger of a high-status person. Presumably during the time in the soil it broke and its current shape came into being. Similar rings, yet with somewhat different decorations or motifs, are known from other Slavic sites (Łęga 1930, 137–138, Plate 31.41–42; Schmidt 1992, 34, 96f., Plate 43.b and 44.c) and the fortification Eketorp III on the Swedish island of Öland (Borg 1998, 278, Y 26:33 LH, V 13:37 LH). The Gaarz exemplar is an extraordinary find in the region; it could hint at the presence of representatives of the highest stratum of Slavic society.

Coins

The most direct evidence of trade and monetary assets found in Gaarz are coins. They form by far the biggest part of the site's silver artefacts and were struck in different mints between the 10th and 12th c. Only two late medieval pennies, so called “Hohlpfennige”, come from another period, but will not be dealt with here. All in all, there are 11 more or less identifiable coins or fragments thereof from the Slavic



Fig. 8. Coins from Gaarz (Photo by I. Sommerfeld, Museum für Archäologie Schloss Gottorf, Landesmuseen Schleswig-Holstein)

era (Fig. 8). Two pieces of Islamic coinage (sg. Dirham, pl. Darāhim; cf. Brather 1995, 73) from the 10th c. (Fig. 8.1–2; classification by: Dr. Lutz Ilisch, Tübingen University) show the typical fragmentation connected with the use of weight-money (Brather 1995, 79–81; Brather 2008, 223, 229; Steuer 1987, 406; Steuer *et al.* 2002, 137–139). Together with the scales and weights they bear witness to this form of paying system at Gaarz – although the processing of metal would have needed weighing as well and silver coins could have been stored as raw material. The origin of the Darāhim lies far to the east in the former Samanid Empire in the central Asian city of Tashkent, today’s capital of Uzbekistan. Islamic coinage is quite commonly found in the Circum-Baltic areas, especially in hoards, central places and ports of trade, and Samanid silver dominates amongst this material from the beginning of the 10th c. onwards until the influx ceased during the early 11th c. (Brather 1995, 73–77, 99–100; Wiechmann 1996, 77–78). The Darāhim from Gaarz therefore form (further) evidence for the involvement of at least some of the people in Gaarz in Baltic trade and its eastern connections, although it cannot be counted as evidence for direct connections to central Asia.

The other coins from Gaarz are of western origin and most of them are preserved whole (Fig. 8). Two halves of the same coin form

the exception and might have been separated during the years in the soil (Fig. 8.5–6). These coins were struck during the 11th and the first half of the 12th c. and show no deviation from the expected range of coinages in this region (cf. Kilger 2000; Kilger 2004). Most of them were produced in the eastern *Regnum Francorum* (Fig. 8.3–8). There are examples struck by regional lords in Lüneburg or Stade (cf. Kilger 2000, 193, 184), the Oberlausitz region (classification by: Stephan Meinhardt) and early and late examples of so called Niederelbische Agrippiner, possibly struck in Bardowick (cf. Kilger 2004, 226; Kilger 2000, 191f.; Wiechmann 1996, 363, 507–509). Three of the 12th-century coins from Gaarz were found together in a manner that indicates that these pieces were held together by some sort of roll or tube-shaped container (Fig. 8.9–11), similar to a coin wrapper (German: “Münzrolle”; Stephan Meinhardt, personal communication)⁵. Amongst these coins is one Danish example (Fig. 8.9), struck in Ribe between 1104 and 1134 (King Niels Svensson [1104–1134], classification by: Stephan Meinhardt). The two other coins were probably struck between 1100 and 1130 in Starigard/Oldenborg or Old Lübeck (Fig. 8.10–11). This type forms the first coinage struck in the region, most probably by the order of Prince Henry of Old Lübeck (Müller-Wille 2011b, 224–226; Müller-Wille 2011a, 255; cf. Kilger 2000, 89–91). Examples have been found at the two mentioned central places of Ostholstein and at similar places outside this region, but so far no finds are known from rural contexts.

II.2. The character of the settlement as mirrored by the finds

The archaeological material described so far attests to the presence of a Slavic settlement at Gaarz during approximately the 10th to the 12th c. Even though agriculture and husbandry might have played an important role in the life of its inhabitants, this settlement is not to be seen as merely a rural place. Residues of metal production characterise it as a place of crafts, in terms of metal mostly connected with the processing of copper alloys. For the whole period evidence can be given that at least some of the inhabitants accumulated wealth and gained high status or close contact to high-ranking persons in Slavic society – at least on a regional level. Amongst others, fragments of collapsible scales, suitable weights and fragments of millstones as well

⁵ Unfortunately, no traces of this could be secured for further investigation.

as whetstones, both made of foreign materials, indicate trade at Gaarz. There is evidence for intensive connections to Scandinavia and far-reaching contacts to the East. Whether the latter were mediated via some of the great ports of trade on the coast of the Baltic Sea or were of a more direct character cannot be answered here. The coins attest to connections shifting during the 11th and 12th c. towards neighbouring powers in the West, which is in accordance with the general trend in Scandinavian and Western Slavic societies (cf. Brather 1995, 103–107; Brather 2008, 232–235). But the coins do not only show a shift in geographical orientation. While collapsible scales and fragmented coins hint at the use of weight-money during the early phase of the settlement, unfragmented coins and especially the “coin wrapper” tell of a change in the payment system. By the beginning of the 12th c. (at the latest) the people at Gaarz had joined the monetary economy of Western and Central Europe (cf. Kilger 2004, 225–229).

III. The function of the Slavic settlement at Gaarz

In addition to the preceding material-based analysis, the function of the settlement can be further illuminated by taking its location into account. Gaarz lies approximately midway between Starigard/Oldenburg and the Baltic coast to the east near Dahme (Fig. 1). As stated before, it is situated on a peninsula in the Oldenburger Graben (Fig. 2). Prior to draining, water surfaces, wetlands, flood plains and reed-covered riparian zones dominated the low-lying surrounding areas (Oldekop 1908, 51–52). Only in the western part of the Oldenburger Graben a part of this landscape survived, namely Lake Wessek. In the landscape and settlement archaeology of the Oldenburger Graben the extent of water surfaces before draining is a crucial question. For Slavic times the answer determines the probability of a waterway between Starigard/Oldenburg and the Baltic Sea. So far, no consensus could be reached by researchers about this question (cf. Hoffmann 2004; Jakobsen 2004; Kleingärtner 2014, 260–264; Struve 1985, 97–101). However, there are indicators suggesting that the Oldenburger Graben could have been used for traffic by ships during the Slavic Era – at least in its eastern parts.

Slavic place names in the area often contain references to water and the course of cliffs in the northern parts of Ostholstein would

have restricted access points on the coast (Kleingärtner 2014, 260–264, Fig. 39). Transition between inland and the Baltic Sea would have been easiest near the mouth of the Oldenburger Graben and possibly near Heiligenhafen (*ibid.*). Nevertheless, it is disputed whether or to what extent a direct connection between the Oldenburger Graben and the Baltic Sea existed during Slavic times and how the water level is to be estimated. Although rivets from clinker-built ships have been found at Gaarz, they do not constitute conclusive evidence for Slavic sailing there. As the rivets come from the surface, they could stem from another period, especially later times (cf. Szymanski 1929, 13, 56, 59f.)⁶.

The results of geographical research are ambiguous. According to Dietrich Hoffmann, there was no natural direct connection of the Oldenburger Graben to the Baltic Sea during the Slavic period (Hoffmann 2004, 9, 13). Olaf Jakobsen, on the other hand, considers a connection with the Bay of Lübeck in the Early Middle Ages to be very likely (Jakobsen 2004, 95). According to Jakobsen's model (Jakobsen 2004, 95–109) – yet contradicted by Hoffmann (Hoffmann 2004, 13) – water levels in the Oldenburger Graben would have been similar to those shown on the Early Modern maps (e.g. Johannes Mejer 1649, see Kartensammlung Moll). Should Jakobsen's assumption hold true, then it would have been possible to navigate at least the eastern part of the Oldenburger Graben⁷. Even if ship traffic had not reached Starigard/Oldenburg itself (cf. Struve 1985, 97–99), the waterway would nevertheless have facilitated journeys and transport between this central place and the Baltic Sea. The exhausting land-bound route through the moraine landscape of northern Ostholstein could thus have been avoided.

Considering Gaarz's location in the middle of the Oldenburger Graben and the supposed waterway, the Slavic settlement could have been a harbour and acted as a station on this trading route. The lack of metal finds and other luxury artefacts around Starigard/Oldenburg and Gaarz suggests that the more precious goods traded and produced in Gaarz were not meant for a broader local market. While more mundane objects – not (yet) reflected in the archaeological record –

⁶ The Oldenburger Graben was navigated well into modern times and fishing took place near Gaarz up to the early 20th c. (Abraham 1977, 52; Hücke 1964, 12, 14).

⁷ This hypothesis is supported by calculations of the mean sea level rise during the Early Middle Ages based on Jakobsen's data on sea level rise of the Baltic Sea (Jakobsen 2004, 109, Fig. 39).

such as agricultural products and textiles, might have played a role in the local trade, the site did not constitute a market place for metal or luxurious artefacts. Instead, Gaarz provided these goods for the region's leading persons. Some of them might have stayed there or stationed a representative. Given its excellent strategic position, Gaarz could well have acted as a base for executing power over the surrounding area and the waterway – or over the people and goods thereon respectively. As mentioned before, the name and topographic conditions even support the idea of a Slavic fortification at Gaarz (cf. Hucke 1964, 17; Meinhardt 2013, 84f.), but proof of this hypothesis could not be provided yet.

As the settlement – and supposedly minor central place – at Gaarz was in existence parallel to Starigard/Oldenburg during approximately 200 years, close ties must have existed between them. Without the consent and protection of the ruler at Starigard/Oldenburg, Gaarz could hardly have prospered.

Both places declined during the 12th c., a troubled period for Ostholstein, which saw the destruction of the fortresses and their settlements in Starigard/Oldenburg and Old-Lübeck (Gabriel 1991, 81–83; Struve 1985, 85–107). Whereas Oldenburg was founded anew as a medieval “German” town, Old-Lübeck gave little but its name to the new and proud city of Lübeck (Gabriel 1991, 81–83; Struve 1985, 95–107; cf. Brather 2008, 85–87). In Gaarz, the wealthy settlement vanished, whether by force or decay remains unclear. Settlement activity most probably shifted or was reduced to the area of the later manor, for late medieval finds indicate an end of settlement and change in activity on LA 132. With the results presented here a new chapter has been opened for the site and for Slavic archaeology in the region. It will be most exciting to learn what the site holds in store in the future.

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