

Abb. 5. Wederath, Waffen aus Grab 1344 (nach CORDIE-HACKENBERG - HAFNER 1991, Taf. 358. 359), ohne Maßstab.

WEAPONS IN A LATE 1ST CENTURY GRAVE IN NIJMEGEN (NL)

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During the Batavian revolt, in the year AD 70, the civil settlement *Oppidum Batavorum* on the strategic Valkhof promontory in Nijmegen, overlooking the river Waal, was set to fire. Shortly after this revolt a new civil settlement developed in the low area on the west side of present day Nijmegen. This became the largest and most important town in the Roman Netherlands.

Around AD 98 emperor Trajan gave his name to this new capital of the *civitas Batavorum*, which was from now on officially called *Ulpia Noviomagus Batavorum*. In connection with the grant of this new name Trajan may have given the *vicus* the status of *municipium*.

The cemetery of *Noviomagus* lies to the south of the town, as well as to the east along the road leading to the legionary fortress¹ (Fig. 1).

The first large-scale modern excavation was carried out between 1981 and 1983 by the University of Nijmegen². It brought to light the partially robbed foundations of a series of walled enclosures, measuring 36 x 36 meters on the inside, that is 150 x 150 Roman feet, flanked by two smaller ones, each measuring 14.50 x 14.50 meters, that is 50 x 50 feet and a fourth enclosure to the north of them. Within each enclosure heavy, robbed foundations of huge limestone monuments were discovered (Fig. 2 + Fig. 3).

The monumental grave complexes with these grave monuments, erected around AD 90-100 on a prominent location on the south eastern side of *Novioma-*

gus along a possible road, originate in Italian-Roman grave ritual. Outstanding grave monuments were built to ensure that the deceased would stay in communal memory. The combination of the stone enclosure walls with the limestone grave monuments show distinct influence of Roman culture (Fig. 4).

Such monumental grave complexes were erected all over the Roman empire, but only for those with enormous financial capacity: the wealthy urban elite, rich landowners or soldiers and veterans in the higher ranks of the Roman army. Building a grave monument emphasized the economic success and the social position of the deceased.

The attachment to indigenous traditions was not directed to the outside of the graves, but to their inside. No tumuli were erected for these graves, nor ditches dug. But the construction of wooden grave chambers, to which a lot of attention was given, and its furnishing with extensive grave inventories, clearly shows the connection to Gaulish-Celtic cultural traditions (Fig. 5).

Examples of such elite burials in wooden grave chambers are known from the Roman period all over western Europe. From the extensive grave inventories one can deduce that these people believed in the afterlife, for which the dwelling of the deceased - the wooden grave chamber - had to be furnished. Some of the grave gifts, like the weapons, aimed at clarifying the status of the dead.

¹ WILLEMS - VAN ENCKEVORT 2009, 69-79.

² KOSTER 2010.

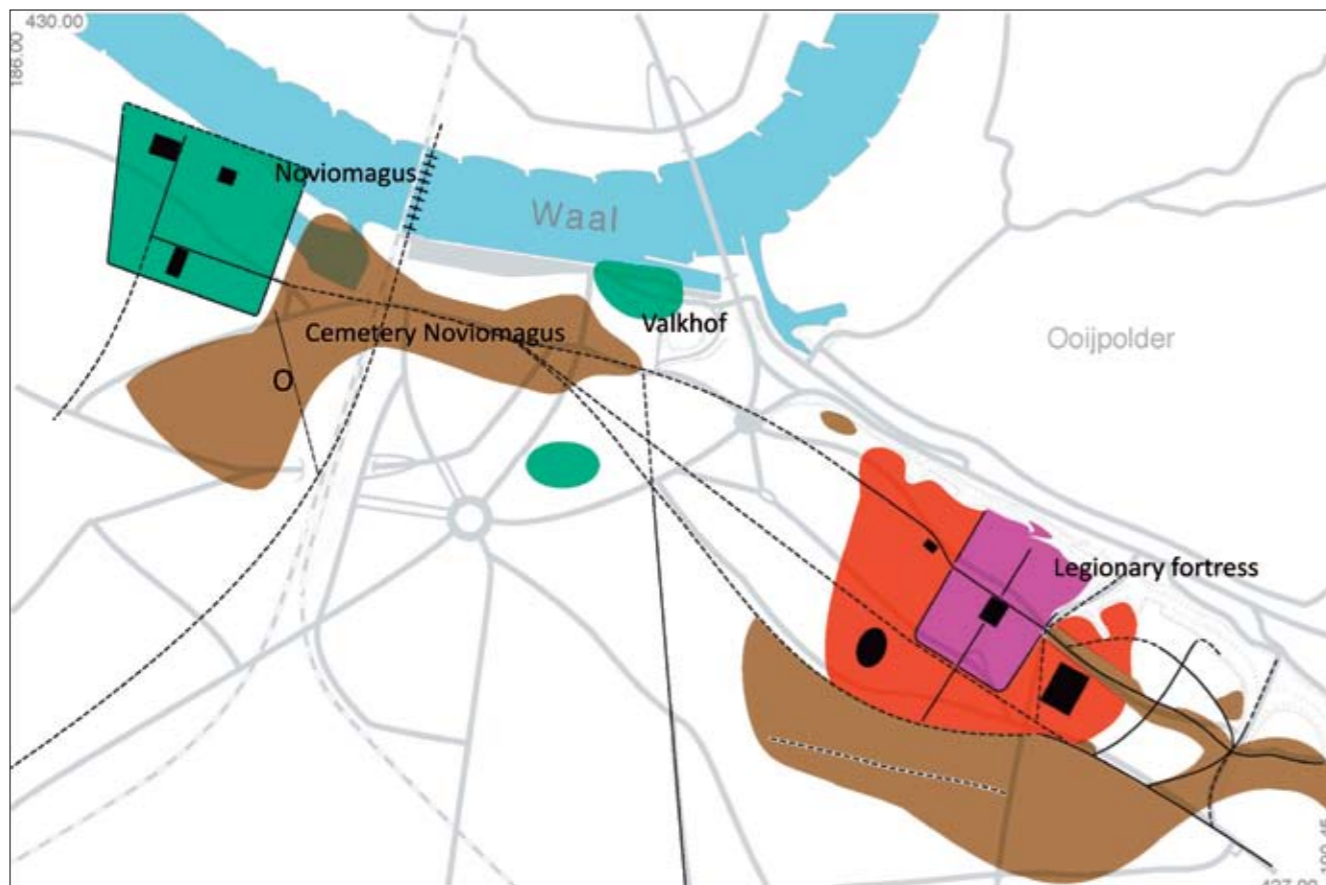


Fig. 1. Nijmegen 70-270 AD with location of the walled enclosures. (Dep. of Archaeology of the City of Nijmegen)

The grave goods point out that the deceased was acquainted with both the Gaulish-Celtic and with the Roman burial traditions.

The wealth of the burials found within the enclosures is expressed by the large number of grave gifts, as well as by the costliness of the materials used to make them. Some of the burials contained more than 70 objects, mostly of pottery and glass, but also of bronze and iron. The graves stand out for the extraordinary objects: 13 pieces of carved amber, a die and two rings made of rock crystal, a wooden folding chair with bronze mountings and leather seat and back, weapons and writing utensils. Mainly on the basis of the pottery - especially the Samian ware - and the coins, the burials are dated between AD 80 and 115.

The only burial with weapons holds a glass urn with the cremated bones of a person between 20 and 40 years, who's sex could not be identified from the cremation remains. The inventory of the grave consists of extensive eating and drinking sets, glass vessels, toilet utensils and writing implements, a bronze lamp and the weapons - a shield with a light shield boss and three

iron spearheads. On the basis of the potters stamps on the Samian ware and the other ceramics the burial is dated AD 90-95 (Fig. 6).

The grave goods had been placed in a large wooden burial chamber of 1.65 x 1.75 m of 70 cm high, which was completely decayed; the traces of the wood were visible as brown stripes in the sand (see Fig. 5).

The three iron spearheads are of a type common in the 1st century in the western provinces. They must have belonged to spears of 160-180 cm or shorter, assuming that they were not broken before they were placed in the burial chamber (Fig. 7).

The wooden shield must have stood against the eastern wall of the chamber. Of this shield only the tinned bronze *umbo*, two bronze rivets with adhering wood of the shield and the iron handgrip remained. The wood was identified as alder (Fig. 8, Fig. 9).

The shield boss is very thin and light, only 200 grams, and was chased. Concentric grooves on the flange indicate finishing on the lathe. Only the outside surface of the *umbo* is tinned. There are no holes in the flange

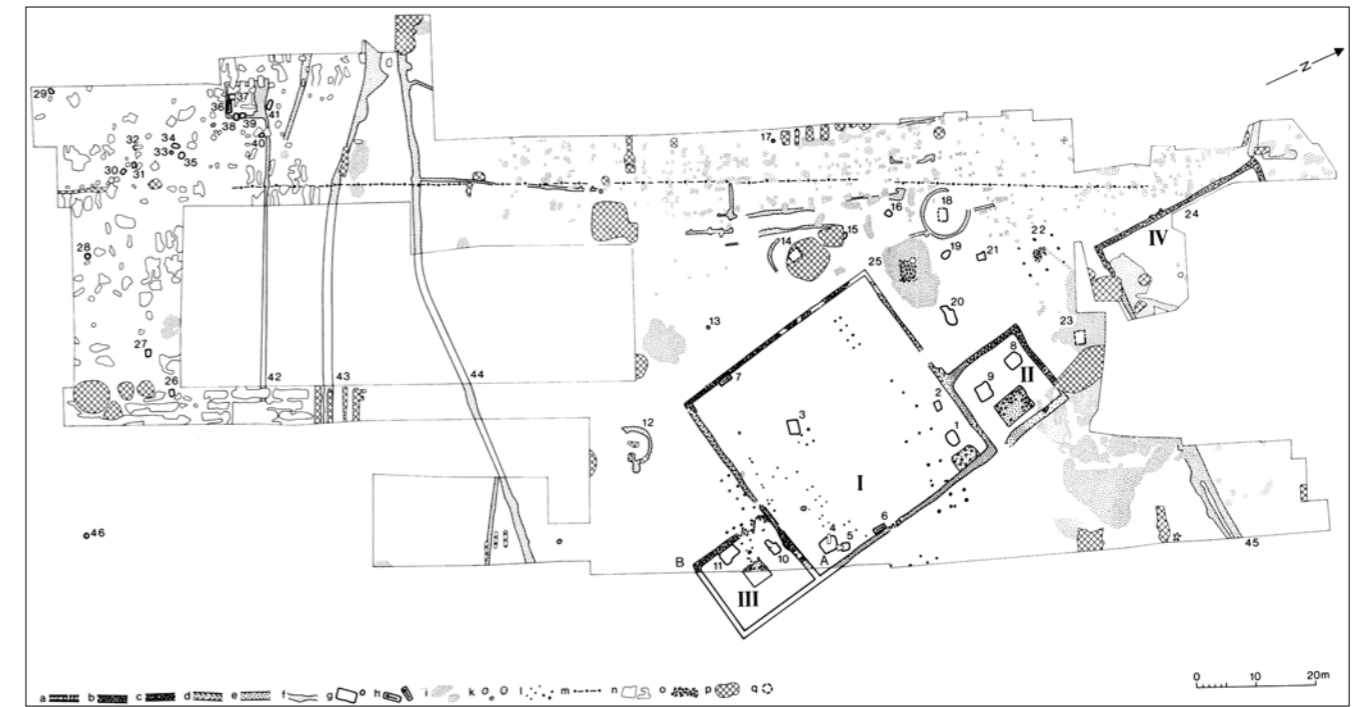


Fig. 2. Excavations in the cemetery of Noviomasus 1981-1983. (Radboud University Nijmegen; drawing R.P. Reijnen)

for rivets to fix the *umbo* to the shield and no other signs of fixing either. Most likely the two rivets, which were found with the shield boss, were driven into the wood of the shield and their ends turned back against the shield. The thickness of the shield, 4-5 mm, can be deduced from the space between the head of the rivet and the turned end of it.

The back of the *umbo* may have been soldered to the rivets, as is shown in the picture. The iron handgrip must have had four rivets by which it was fixed to the shield (Fig. 8).

From London equally thin shield bosses are known. For one of them it has been suggested that it was not used in battle, but may have been part of a parade shield³. As the other one misses the holes for rivets, it was thought that this *umbo* had never been fixed to a shield⁴.

But all bronze shield bosses from Dura Europos, made of thin sheet bronze, seem to have been used in battle and they were not part of parade shields. Most likely these round shield bosses were part of the light, oval shields of the auxiliary troops⁵.

In principle the three spears in the Nijmegen burial could have been used by both auxiliary infantry or cavalry, but from the length of the spearheads we suggest

that they were used as thrusting spears or lances used by an auxiliary horseman. The longer spearheads were a huge advantage for a horseman, because they could cause a lot of damage, without the horseman losing them.

On 1st century cavalry gravestones we see the servant or *calo* holding spare spears and from Arrian we know that cavalry soldiers carried three or four spears⁶.

But there is another group of objects in this weapon burial that is possibly connected with the cavalryman and his horse: the set of four remarkably big *strigiles* consisting of a bronze blade and an iron grip (Fig. 10). Most likely they had been deposited on the cover of the wooden grave chamber and had slid down as the cover mouldered away and collapsed. During the excavation the set was found on top of the glass cremation urn.

The *strigiles* seem to be rather coarse for a man. For the iron *strigilis* in the wagon burial of Káloz Eva Bónis suggested that it could have been used for horses⁷. From literary sources of late antiquity and from the find of a *stigilis* in a stable at the *castellum* Ilkley in Britain, dating to the beginning of the 3rd century, it has been deduced that *strigiles* were used for horses, in any case in the late Roman period⁸. They could have been used as a sweat scraper or for removing mud from

³ BRITANNIA 1980, 320-323.

⁴ BRITANNIA 1984, 246-250

⁵ JAMES 2004, 160.

⁶ JUNCKELMANN 1991, 175-182 (Der Reitertraktat des Arrian); ADLER 1993, 244, 259.

⁷ BÓNIS 1981, 136.

⁸ KOTERA-FEYER 1993; 8. ZAGREB · 2010 · RADOVI · PROCEEDINGS · AKTEN



Fig. 3. Front of the northern enclosure of 50 by 50 feet, with the robbed foundation of a monument and two burials behind it: a woman's grave (left) and a man's grave with weapons (right). (Radboud University Nijmegen).

horses' legs. We should consider this possibility and look more closely at the find circumstances of coarse *strigiles*, in order to find more supportive evidence for this hypothesis.

In his *Germania* Tacitus mentions the gift of weapons in graves as a custom of the Germanic tribes⁹. He considers shield and spear as the standard armament of the Germans and he also emphasizes the central place the weapons took in their lives¹⁰. A man had to bring shield, spear and sword as part of the dowry¹¹. And in addition the shield may have had a symbolic function, as can be deduced from the description by Tacitus of the raising to the shield of *Brinno*, the leader of the *Cananefates*, the neighbouring tribe of the *Batavians*¹².

In Southern Gaul there are hardly any weapons in graves after the middle of the 1st century BC, when the Roman province of *Gallia Narbonensis* was founded and Romanisation started¹³. The same holds true for the Alpine region: after the Roman conquest in the Augustan period weapons gradually disappear as grave gifts. The Romanisation of the elite in this region and

the changes it caused for the society influenced the status symbols and as a consequence also the grave gifts¹⁴.

Until the middle of the 1st century AD burials with weapons are not uncommon in the northern parts of Gaul, in the middle of France, and especially in Trier and surroundings. Like the rich chamber burials of Goeblingen-Nospelt, which are considered to be the burials of the aristocracy of the *Treveri* who had gained wealth and prestige in the early Augustan period. These persons, who were buried with their weapons and spurs, are regarded as armed cavalymen, most likely the commanders of the indigenous cavalry in Roman military service¹⁵. Comparable burials in the district of the *Bituriges* (Dep. Berry, F.) are considered to be members of the local aristocracy, possibly veterans of the auxiliary troops¹⁶.

In Lower Germany, west of the Rhine, weapon burials occur on a very small scale from the Augustan till the Claudian-Neronian period.

¹⁴ MARTIN-KILCHER 1998, 235.

¹⁵ ROYMANS 1996, 37-38; METZLER 2001, 274; GLESER 2005, 434.

¹⁶ FERDIÈRE - VILLARD 1993, 22-30.



Fig. 4. Reconstruction of the grave monuments. (Museum Het Valkhof, Nijmegen; drawing Paul Maas)

But the weapon burials we know, like the famous grave of Mehrum - dating shortly after the middle of the 1st century AD -, belong to the richest in the region. The Mehrum burial has mixed Germanic-Roman weapons and it is thought to have been the grave of a leader of a tumultuarian Germanic unit, serving as an auxiliary for the Roman army¹⁷.

The weapons must have been the private property of the Germanic soldiers and they stayed in their possession after the military service and went with them to their homelands. The veterans may have kept their weapons as some kind of status symbols or as personal commemoration with emotional value. Their relatives may have put them in the grave in that capacity¹⁸. After the middle of the 1st century AD weapon burials almost disappear in Lower Germany¹⁹. The more curious is the burial from Nijmegen, dating AD 90/95.

The weapons in this grave hint at an indigenous Batavian or Gaulish origin of the deceased. The other grave goods, like the extensive eating and drinking sets, glass vessels, toilet utensils and writing implements and a bronze lamp, make it less plausible that this person was of Germanic origin.

The shield could have been his personal weapon, but could also have had a symbolic meaning for the leader of the group to which the man belonged.

The combination of the weapons, the shield with the light *umbo* and the three spears with iron heads, and maybe also the set of coarse *strigiles*, seems to indicate that the deceased was a cavalryman serving in an aux-

¹⁷ GECHTER - KUNOW 1983, 454-455.

¹⁸ NICOLAY 2003, 364; NICOLAY 2007, 173-176, 199-204.

¹⁹ BRUNSTING 1937, 184, vondst 25; NICOLAY 2007, 202-204: only stray finds from the area of the cemetery of *Noviomagus*.

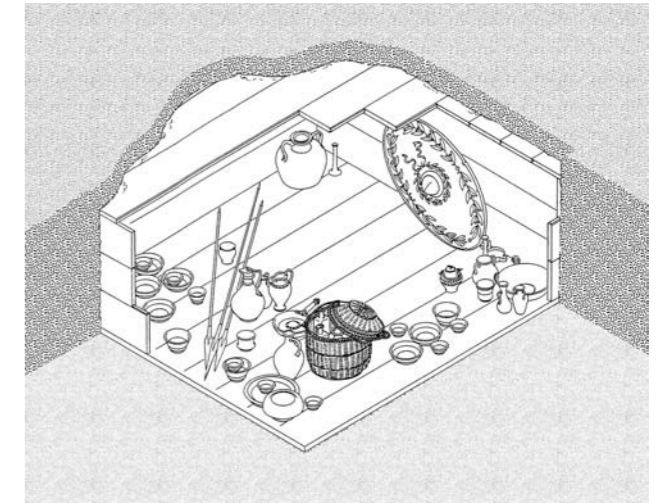


Fig. 5. Reconstruction of the wooden chamber of weapon grave nr. 8. (Museum Het Valkhof, Nijmegen; drawing Bill Easter)

iliary unit. As for this man, one could imagine he was one of the leading officers of the Batavian cavalry, the *ala Batavorum*²⁰.

In view of the man's age at death, 20-40 years, and the dating of the grave around AD 90-95, it is likely that he entered the army shortly after the Batavian revolt of AD 70²¹. We know that in the pre-Flavian period the Batavians provided eight cohorts and one *ala* for the Roman army in closed ethnic units, and that these troops had their own Batavian commanders who were already Roman citizens, like *Julius Civilis* who initiated the revolt²².

It has been suggested that the *ala Batavorum* was stationed in Nijmegen on the Kops Plateau in the pre-Flavian period. The stables, which were found there, the numerous pieces of horse equipment and a series of cavalry helmets make this assumption very plausible. Furthermore it is remarkable that the camp on the Kops Plateau was not set to fire during the Batavian revolt, as most other camps in the region²³.

After the Batavian revolt a new *ala Batavorum* seems to have been formed. We don't know where this new *ala Batavorum milliaria* was stationed in the Flavian period until AD 89. This could have been *Britannia*, *Raetia*, *Noricum*, *Pannonia* and also *Germania Inferior*²⁴.

However, the globular flask with enamelled decoration (Fig. 11), found in the weapon grave in Nijmegen, must have been made in Castleford (West-Yorkshire), where moulds for flasks with exactly the same deco-

²⁰ KOSTER 2010, 257.

²¹ KOSTER 2010, 262.

²² WILLEMS 1984, 229-230; SLOFSTRA 2002, 25; ROYMANS 2004, 61-63.

²³ WILLEMS - VAN ENCKEVORT 2009, 39.

²⁴ HAALBOS 2000a, 42-43, 63-64.

⁹ TACITUS, *Germania* 27.

¹⁰ TACITUS, *Germania* 6, 13, 14; ADLER 1993, 241-245.

¹¹ TACITUS, *Germania*, 18, 2.

¹² TACITUS, *Historiae*, 4, 15.

¹³ FEUGÈRE 1993, 122-123, 152.



Fig. 6. Inventory of weapon grave nr. 8. (Museum Het Valkhof, Nijmegen)

ration have been found²⁵. This could be an indication that this cavalry man, and possibly the whole *ala Batavorum*, was stationed in Britain for some years after the Batavian revolt²⁶. They must have been back in *Germania Inferior* before AD 89, as they took part in the suppression of the uprising of *Saturninus* against Domitian, and received the name of honour *pia fidelis* for it. But in the military diploma of Elst, near Nijmegen, dating from AD 98 the *ala Batavorum* is mentioned as one of the units stationed in *Germania Inferior*. So it is even possible that they stayed in this province during the whole Flavian period²⁷.

It is likely that after the Batavian revolt the small elite of Batavians who had lead the revolt, had to give way for a new elite who had stayed loyal to Rome. This elite did not only manifest itself in the army, but after their service they may have returned to their own region and dedicated themselves to the civil administration and economic activities²⁸.

²⁵ KOSTER 2010, 149.

²⁶ KOSTER 2010, 263.

²⁷ HAALEBOS 2000a, 42-43, 63-64; HAALEBOS 2000b, 30.

²⁸ HAALEBOS 2000a, 33; SLOFSTRA 2002, 30-35.

After the revolt the Batavian units still seem to have been commanded by their own leaders, like the prefect of the *Cohors IX Batavorum* in *Vindolanda*, *Flavius Cerialis*, who most likely was of Batavian origin and possibly even of royal birth. He may have belonged to this new elite.

The same could be true for the horseman in the weapon grave from Nijmegen. His status is shown by the monumental walled enclosure with the grave monument and the extensively furnished wooden grave chamber with the weapons.

I would like to see this man as an important leader, most likely Batavian and commander of a cavalry unit, probably the *ala Batavorum milliaria*. The fact that he was buried with his weapons, according to an old tradition, could be an indication for his royal decent.

That he was buried on a prominent location in the cemetery of the civil settlement *Noviomagus* could be explained by the presence of a female burial within the same enclosure. Most likely this man wanted to be buried in the place where his wife and family lived and they wanted him to live on in the memory of the community by erecting a huge grave monument for him.

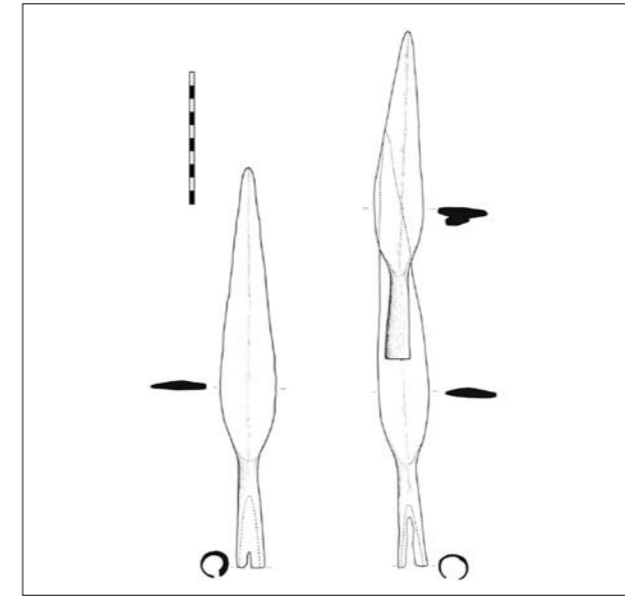


Fig. 7. Three iron spearheads; length 25.2, 30.3 and 33.3 cm. (Radboud University Nijmegen; drawing R.P. Reijnen)

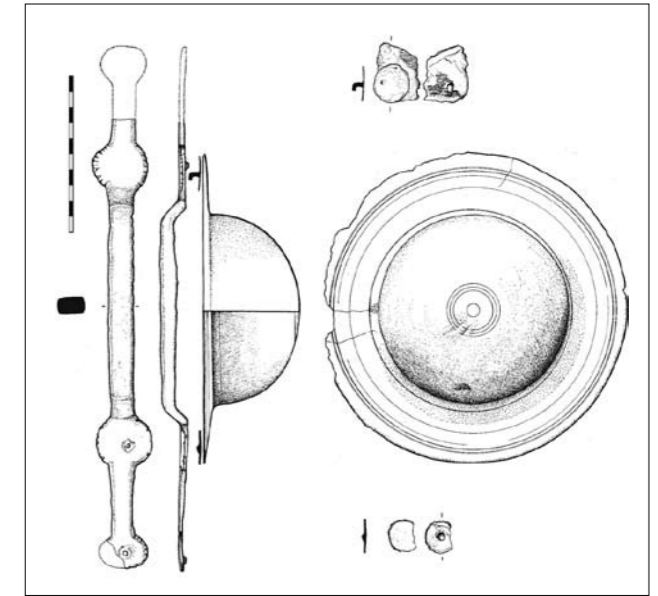


Fig. 8. Tinned bronze shield boss with two rivets and iron shield grip. Diameter of the flange of the *umbo*: 19.2 cm (Radboud University Nijmegen; drawing R.P. Reijnen)



Fig. 9. Tinned bronze shield boss and iron shield grip. (Museum Het Valkhof, Nijmegen)



Fig. 10. Four *strigiles* from the weapon grave. Length of the *strigiles* ca. 26 cm. (Museum Het Valkhof, Nijmegen)



Fig. 11. Globular flask with enamelled decoration. Height: 9.9 cm. (Museum Het Valkhof, Nijmegen)

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