

ROMAN MILITARY EQUIPMENT FROM THE HAGUE HOLLAND¹

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In December 1984, the archaeological service of The Hague started an excavation on the Scheveningseweg, the road connecting the city with the seaside-resort of Scheveningen. The site proved to be a very interesting one. Two different occupation layers were discovered, both from the Roman period. Surprisingly enough the later phase yielded a fair amount of third century military equipment. This article provides some information on the site itself and gives some interpretations of the data assembled so far. It concludes with a description of the most important military finds.

I. THE SITE

The Scheveningseweg is situated within the area of the so-called Younger Dunes, a formation of aeolian sands dating from the Middle Ages and covering a much older dune-landscape. That landscape consisted of a series of sand ridges, so-called coastal barriers, running roughly parallel to the coastline, with depressions in between where beds of peat were formed.² From prehistoric times onward occupation concentrated on these coastal barriers; the Scheveningseweg-site was situated on such a ridge, a very small and, until recently, unknown one (Fig.1).

The original occupation layer, on top of that small ridge, was buried deep under the deposits of the Younger Dunes, which accounted for its fine state of preservation. In the past years an area of approximately 45 by 50 metres could be investigated.

Two different occupation levels were discovered. The oldest one need not concern us here: it was the remainder of a rural settlement dating from the first half of the 2nd century A.D. It was occupied by the original inhabitants of the region, the Cananefates. Finds as well as soil marks look the same as those of the Cananefatian settlement at Rijswijk-de Bult.³ A period of drifting sand ended the occupation.

Before the end of the 2nd century, a new settlement came into being on the now somewhat more uneven terrain. During the excavation the usual soil marks were found: wells, pits, ditches and the postholes and foundation trenches of three or four simple wooden buildings. Nothing indeed to make the site special, except for the finds.

Of course pottery was abundantly present. Only imported wheel thrown types were found; the contrast to the earlier occupation level, where the bulk of the pottery finds was formed by local handmade ware, is striking. The types fall within the Niederbieber typology⁴ and resemble the pottery of the third period of the Zwammerdam castellum.⁵ The occupation level can thus be dated in the late 2nd and first half of the 3rd century A.D.

Apart from the pottery an extraordinary quantity of terracotta

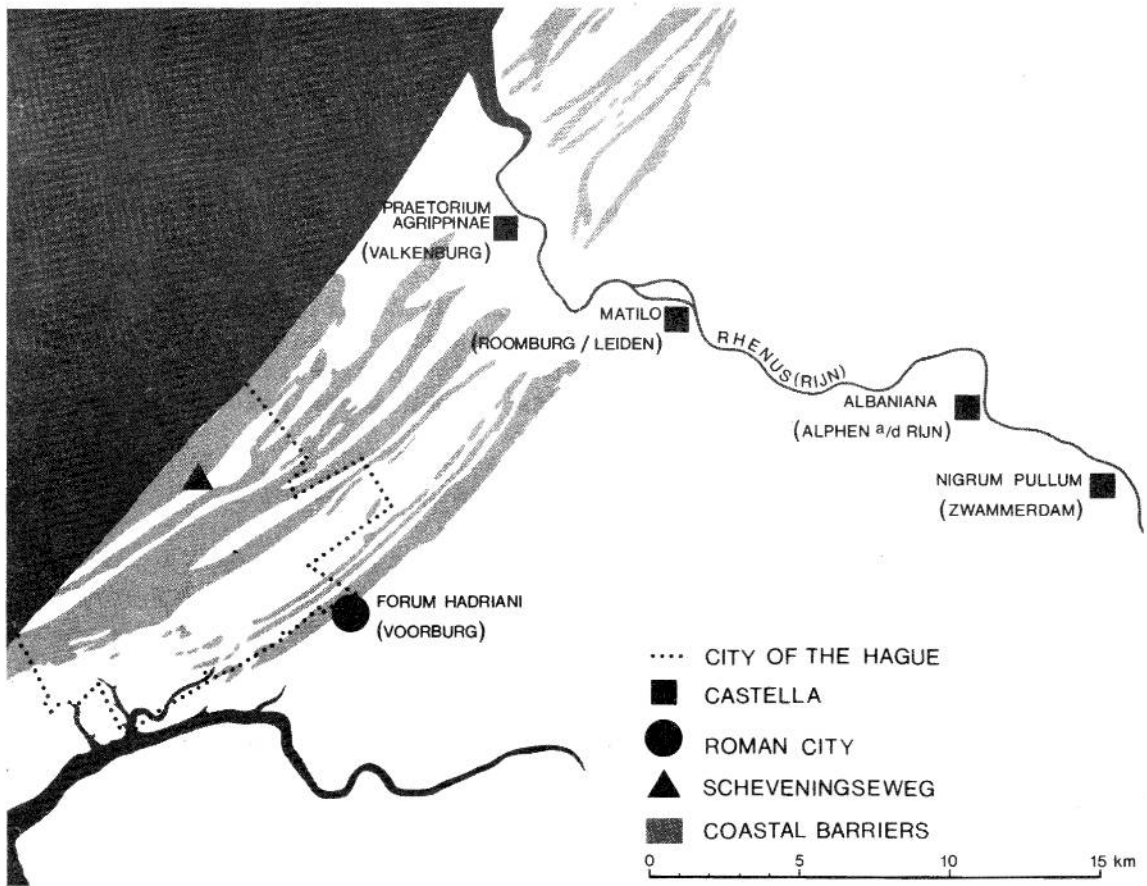


Fig.1: The limes in the coastal area of the Netherlands 1:250.000.

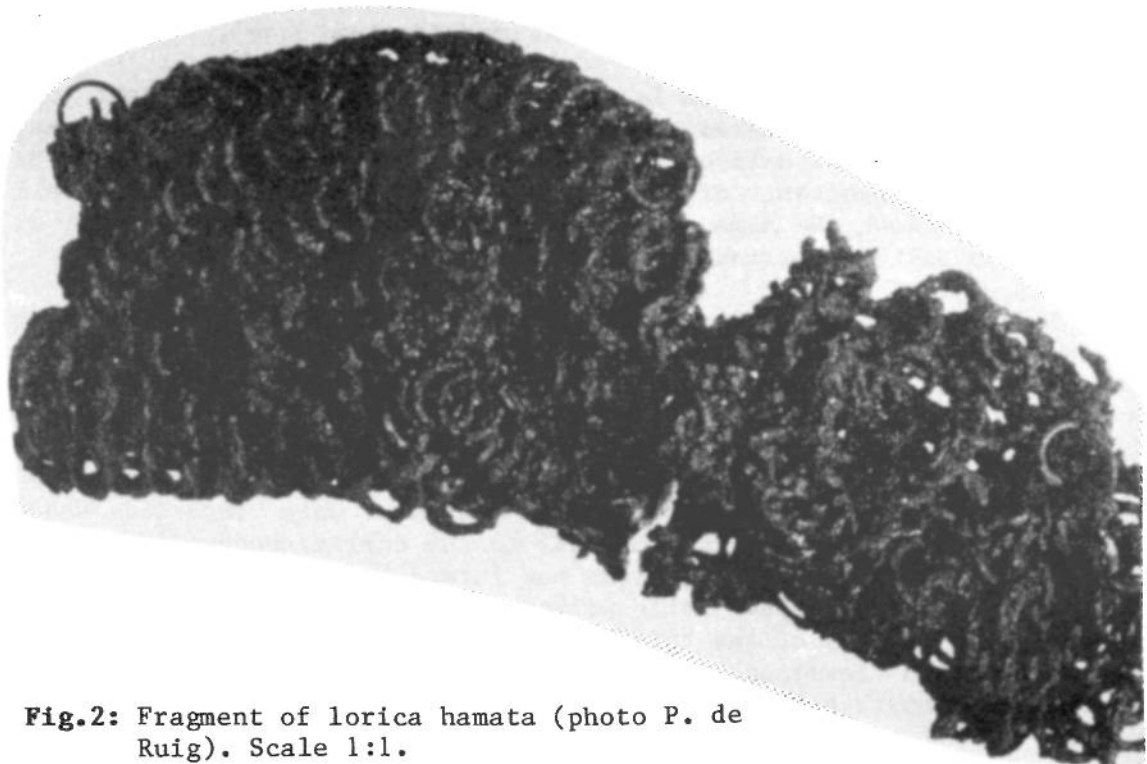


Fig.2: Fragment of lorica hamata (photo P. de Ruig). Scale 1:1.

figurines was found. More than eighty fragments have come to light so far. Among these are mother goddesses, goddesses like Minerva and Venus and even animals. It is one of the largest finds of its kind in the Netherlands.⁶ Most surprising however were the military finds. Two bronze and two bone scabbard chapes came to light as well as a bronze scabbard runner, two hilt guards, two spearheads, a belt plate and several fragments of a mail shirt (lorica hamata). Even several types of military brooches, like bow and knee brooches, were dug up in fair quantities. Some of these items were found in pits, but most came from the occupation layer and were always incomplete, indicating that they were lost or discarded. Most of the equipment has its counterparts in the Oldenstein typology⁷ and can thus again be dated in the period A.D. 175-250. Apart from that, seven hobnailed soles of shoes were found, the military origin of which is not certain.

II. INTERPRETATION

It is difficult to give a detailed interpretation of the Scheveningseweg-site. Firstly because only a small part of the settlement has as yet been unearthed; the rest remains inaccessible under the present buildings and houses on the spot. Secondly because the study of the data and finds has only recently started and thirdly because only the finds are a bit unusual; theories based on the finds still cannot be confirmed by traces in the ground. So we have to speculate a little.

The terracotta figurines seem to point to a sanctuary somewhere in the direct vicinity. A few of the excavated pits yielded complete objects, mostly pottery, instead of the usual waste material. For instance one pit contained a dinner plate made of tin, two colour-coated beakers and a neolithic stone axe. Such phenomena can perhaps be connected with some sort of ritual of which we do not know anything yet.⁸

The military finds are even more enigmatic. They seem to point to some kind of military occupation. Although the limes is not really far away (some 14 km; see fig.1), the site is clearly outside limes territory, however. I think we can exclude the possibility of a veterans settlement considering the quantity of military objects. Military posts behind the limes are not a regular feature in Dutch archaeology; only a few sites have been proposed as such and none have been recognized beyond any doubt so far.⁹ Nevertheless, the Scheveningseweg-site could be a candidate for such a function.

A Roman road must have run along one of the coastal barriers, connecting the limes with the Meuse estuary.¹⁰ It is to be expected that roads leading inland would have been protected by guard posts or even milecastles, especially for the period concerned, when raids from non-Roman territory became more frequent. It is interesting in this respect to see a new and clearly different settlement being set up here in the beginning of this period.

In short it is very tempting, but hardly proven at present, to see the site as a guard post on the long sought-for road. A sanctuary on this road is at least plausible too. The simple wooden buildings could

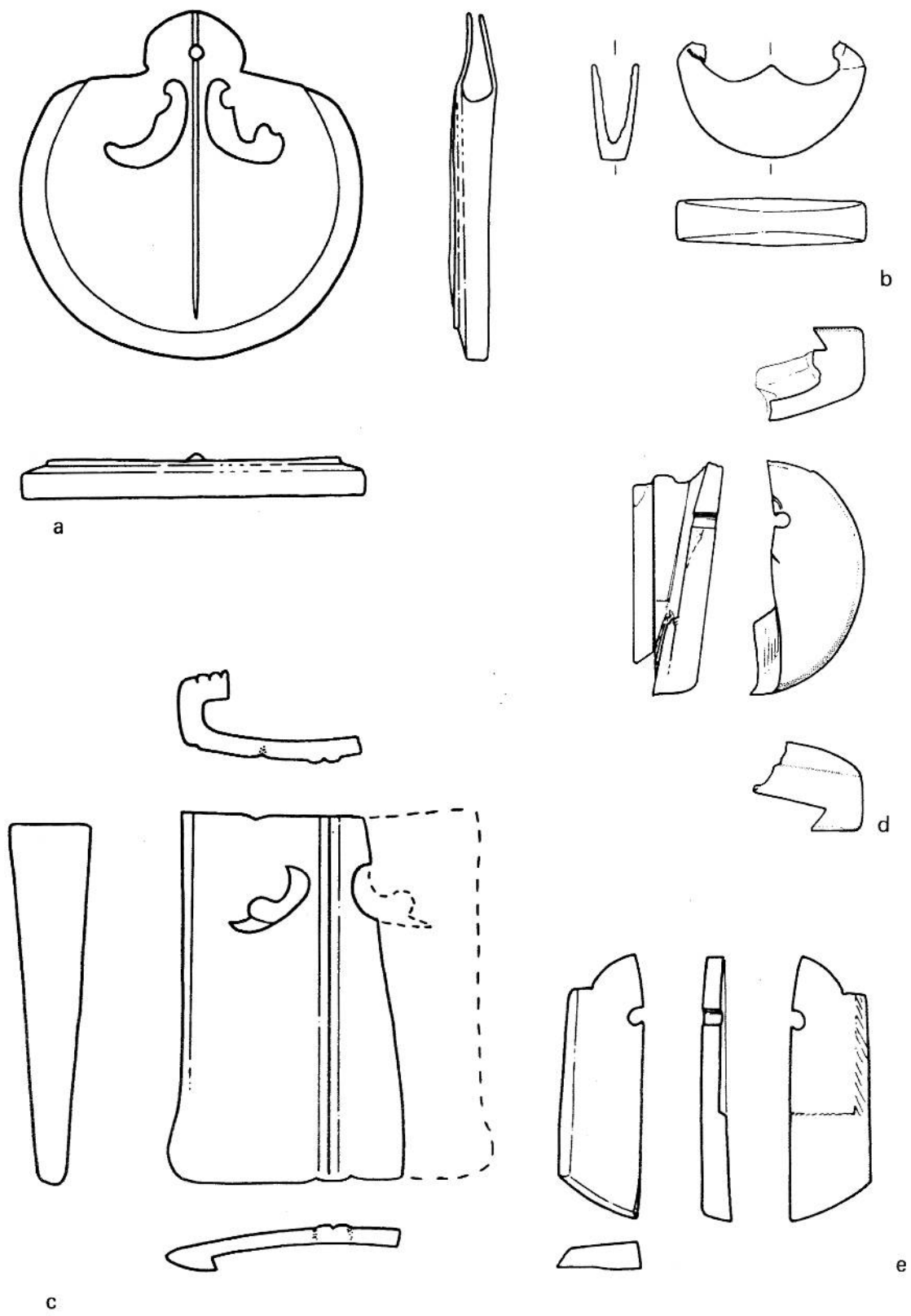


Fig.3: Bronze and bone scabbard chapes 1:1. All drawings J.T. de Jong.

be connected with a part of a civilian settlement, a sort of vicus. But as has been said before: this is mere speculation at the moment. It is, however, a good working hypothesis for excavations and research to come.

III. THE FINDS

In this section the most important military finds will be described. The hobnailed soles of shoes are omitted here, because they do not give an absolute proof of the existence of Roman soldiers on the spot.

Lorica hamata

Large fragment of mailshirt (fig.2) (SCH 84/2408.1). Made of iron, a few rings made of bronze. Rings are between 7 and 8 mm in diameter. Owing to the sandy soil very heavily corroded, except for the bronze rings which are in good condition. As far as can be seen it is a normal type of mailshirt consisting of alternating rows of punched and riveted rings.

Scabbard chapes

- Bronze scabbard chape (SCH 84/190.25; fig.3a) Diam.: 56 mm. Round chape with central rib pierced with two pelta-shaped decorations. For comparable chapes found along German Limes see Oldenstein 1976 Taf. 19-20.
- Bronze scabbard chape (SCH 84/4107.4) (fig.3b) L: 31 mm; W: 15 mm; T: 8 mm. Small semi-circular chape, perhaps for a dagger. Comparable chape found at the Saalburg and Butzbach; see Oldenstein 1976, Taf. 20, nrs. 131-132.
- Bone scabbard chape (SCH 84/1188.1) (fig.3c) L: 60 mm; W: 38 mm. Chape of rectangular shape with a raised double rib and pierced with pelta-shaped decoration. Common form along German limes, see Oldenstein 1976, Taf. 25-26.
In Britain: South Shields¹¹; Richborough¹²
In Holland: Valkenburg¹³
- Bone scabbard chape (SCH 84/1278.1 (fig.3d) L: 38 mm; W: 15 mm. Small fragment of round chape.
- Bone chape piece (SCH 84/3234.2) (fig.3e) L: 43 mm; W: 13 mm; T: 4 mm. Fragment of flat chape piece with sloping sides and curving end. Backside of a round scabbard chape like the one previous mentioned.

Scabbard runner

Bronze scabbard runner (SCH 84/2442.1) (not ill.)
Complete runner with ring terminal and chamfered edge. For comparable forms in Germany see Oldenstein 1976, Taf. 13 nrs. 55-56.
In Britain: South Shields¹⁴
In Holland: Zwammerdam¹⁵

Hilt guards

- Hilt guard made of haddock-bone (SCH 84/349.2) (fig.4a) L: 51 mm; W: 22 mm. This piece is made of very unusual material. As haddock

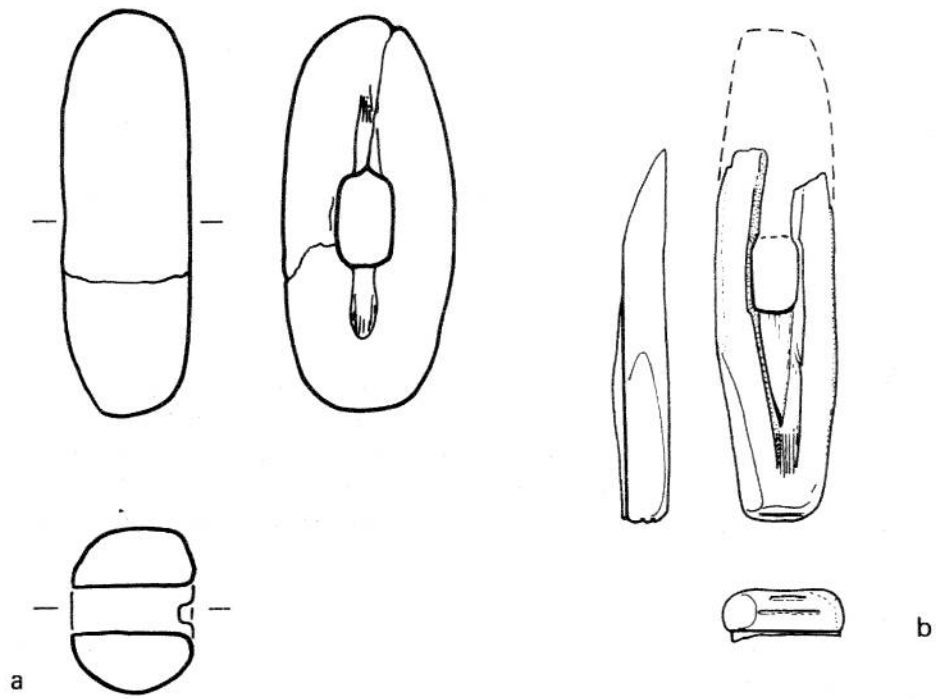


Fig.4: Hilt guards a) haddock bone b) bone 1:1.

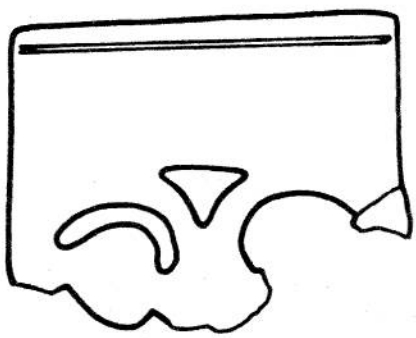


Fig.5: Belt plate 1:1.

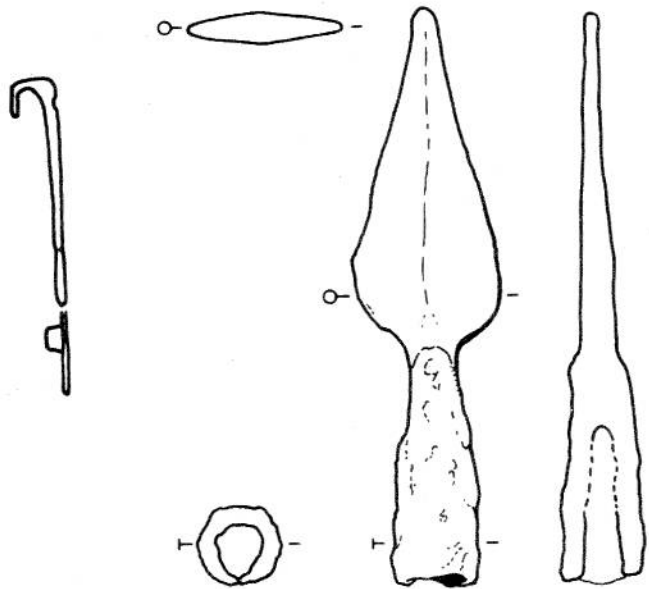


Fig.6: Iron spearhead 1:2.

occurs amongst the faunal remains at the site, it is possible that it was locally made.

- Hilt guard made of bone (SCH 84/4292.1) (fig.4b) L: 49 mm; W: 16 mm. Small fragment of a hilt guard. Width of the blade must have been 40 mm.

Belt plates

- A bronze belt plate (SCH 84/2056.1) (fig.5) L: 51 mm; W: 41 mm. Large fragment with openwork pelta like ornamentation. The upper-rim is turned over for fastening to the leather belt. Similar pieces are known from Upper Germany, see Oldenstein 1976, Taf. 80.

Spearheads

- Iron spearhead (SCH 84/4025.1) (fig.6). L: 154 mm. Owing to the sandy soil the spearhead is heavily corroded. The blade has a thickness of 8 mm. The opening for the shaft is 12 mm. A second spearhead is not yet available for study.

Brooches

- Bow brooch type Böhme 22 (SCH 84/467.1) (fig.7a). One brooch of this type was found. It is very rare outside Upper Germany.¹⁷
- Bow brooch type Böhme 26 (SCH 84/864.1) (fig.7b). Two specimens were found; both incomplete. This type is rather common in Germany, but rare in Holland and Britain.¹⁸ Two brooches of this type have been found at the Roman fort at Leiden-Roomburg.¹⁹

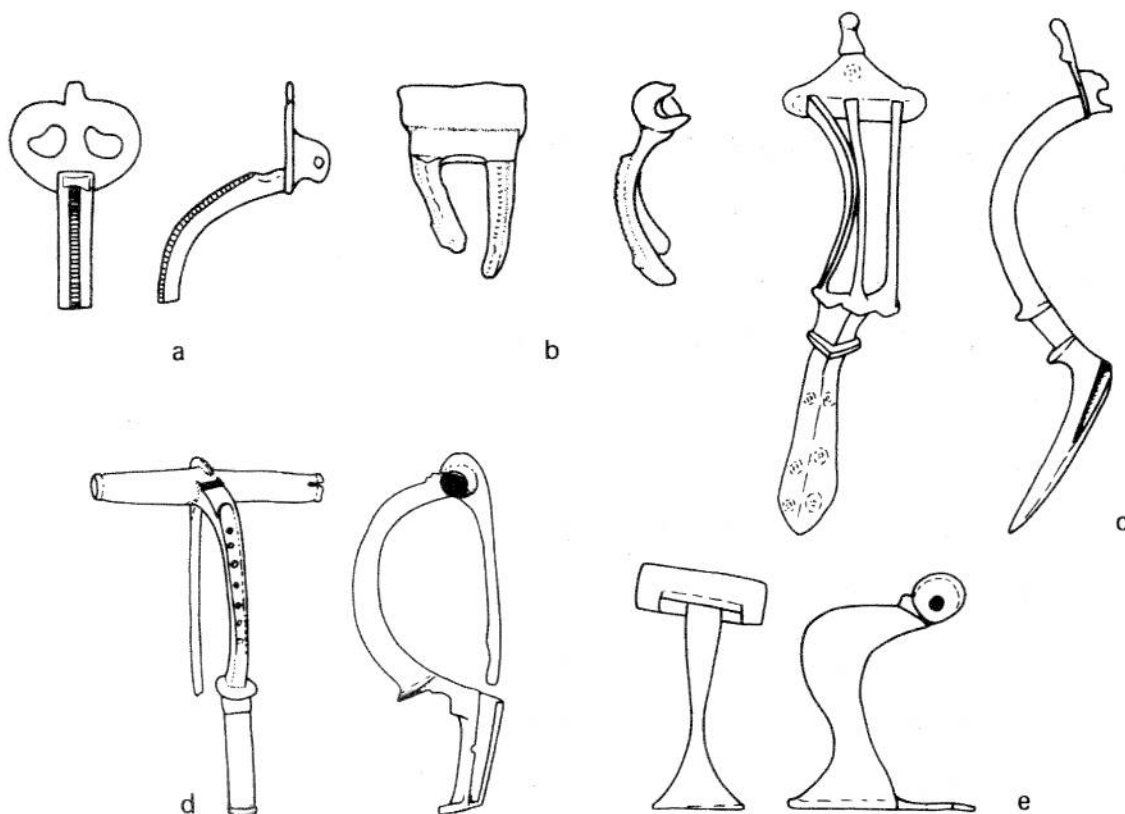


Fig.7: Military brooches 1:1.

- Bow brooch type Böhme 27 (SCH 84/1203.1) (fig.7c). Four specimens of this type were found. Known from several places along the German limes²⁰; in Holland found in Zwammerdam, Woerden, Vechten & Maurik.²¹
- Bow brooch type Böhme 28 (SCH 84/325.1) (fig.7d). Three specimens were found; one of them very incomplete. Known from Britain as well as Germany;²² in Holland found in several forts.²³
- Knee brooch type Böhme 21 (SCH 84/869.29) (fig.7e). Common form along Dutch and German limes. This type is not confined to the limes area, although it is found most frequently there.²⁴

NOTES

1. I would like to thank J.R. Magendans and E.J. van Ginkel for reading, discussing and correcting the manuscript.
2. See for a detailed study of the Older and Younger Dunes: JELGERSMA e.a. 1970
3. BLOEMERS, 1978
4. OELMANN, 1914
5. HAALEBOS, 1977
6. A number of these fragments has already been published: Van BOEKEL, 1987
7. OLDENSTEIN, 1976
8. But see now TURNER & WYMER, 1987
9. Van ES, 1981, p. 116
10. Van ES, 1981, p. 106
11. ALLASON-JONES & MIKET, 1984, p. 47
12. BUSHE-FOX, 1932, p. 79
13. BULT & HALLEWAS, 1987, p. 36
14. ALLASON-JONES & MIKET, 1984, p. 197
15. HAALEBOS, 1977, p. 220, nr. 28
16. Only the military brooches are described here.
17. See BÖHME, 1972, p. 59, findlist 13
18. See BÖHME, 1972, p. 60, findlist 16 & 17
19. Van der KLEI, 1964, p. 95-102

20. BÖHME, 1972, p. 61, findlist 19-21
21. HAALEBOS, 1984/85, p. 60
22. BÖHME, 1972, p. 27
23. HAALEBOS, 1984/85, p. 60.
24. BÖHME, 1972, p. 21; HAALEBOS, 1984/85 p. 57

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