

= Ring of Pietroassa =

The Ring of Pietroassa (or Buz?u torc) is a gold Torc @-@ like necklace found in a ring barrow in Pietroassa (now Pietroasele) , Buz?u County , southern Romania (formerly Wallachia) , in 1837 . It formed part of a large gold hoard (the Pietroasele treasure) dated to between 250 and 400 CE . The ring itself is generally assumed to be of Roman @-@ Mediterranean origin , and features a Gothic language inscription in the Elder Futhark runic alphabet .

The inscribed ring remains the subject of considerable academic interest , and a number of theories regarding its origin , the reason for its burial and its date have been proposed . The inscription , which sustained irreparable damage shortly after its discovery , can no longer be read with certainty , and has been subjected to various attempts at reconstruction and interpretation . Recently , however , it has become possible to reconstruct the damaged portion with the aid of rediscovered depictions of the ring in its original state . Taken as a whole , the inscribed ring may offer insight into the nature of the pre @-@ Christian pagan religion of the Goths .

= = History = =

= = = Origin = = =

The original hoard , discovered within a large ring barrow known as Istri?a hill near Pietroasele , Romania , consisted of 22 pieces , comprising a wide assortment of gold vessels , plates and cups as well as jewelry , including two rings with inscriptions . When first uncovered , the objects were found stuck together by an unidentifiable black mass , leading to the assumption that the hoard might have been covered in some kind of organic material (e.g. cloth or leather) prior to being interred . The total weight of the find was approximately 20 kg (44 lb .) .

Ten objects , among them one of the inscribed rings , were stolen shortly after the find was made , and when the remaining objects were recovered , it was discovered that the other ring had been cut into at least four pieces by a Bucharest goldsmith , whereby one of the inscribed characters had become damaged to the point of illegibility . Fortunately , detailed drawings , a cast , and a photograph made by London 's Arundel Society of the ring before it was damaged survive , and the nature of the lost character can be established with relative certainty .

The remaining objects in the collection display a high quality of craftsmanship such that scholars doubt an indigenous origin . Taylor (1879) , in one of the earliest works discussing the find , speculates that the objects could represent a part of the plunder acquired by Goths in the raids made on the Roman provinces of Moesia and Thrace (238 - 251) . Another early theory , probably first proposed by Odobescu (1889) and picked up again by Giurascu (1976) , identifies Athanaric , pagan king of the Gothic Thervingi , as the likely owner of the hoard , presumably acquired through the conflict with the Roman Emperor Valens in 369 . The Goldhelm catalogue (1994) suggests that the objects could also be viewed as having been gifts made by Roman leaders to allied Germanic princes .

Recent mineralogical studies performed on the objects indicate at least three geographically disparate origins for the gold ore itself : the Southern Ural Mountains , Nubia (Sudan) , and Persia . An indigenous Dacian origin for the ore has been ruled out . Though Cojocaru (1999) rejects the possibility of Roman imperial coins having been melted down and used for some of the objects , Constantinescu (2003) comes to the opposite conclusion .

A comparison of mineralogical composition , smelting and forging techniques , and earlier typological analysis indicates that the gold used to make the inscribed ring , classified as Celto @-@ Germanic , is neither as pure as that of the Graeco @-@ Roman , nor as alloyed as that found in the Polychrome Germanic objects . These results seem to indicate that at least part of the hoard ? including the inscribed ring ? was composed of gold ore mined far north of Dacia , and could therefore represent objects that had been in Gothic possession prior to their southward migration (see Wielbark culture , Chernyakhov culture) . While this may cast some doubt on the traditional

theory regarding a Roman @-@ Mediterranean origin for the ring , further research is necessary before the origin of the material used in its manufacture can be identified conclusively .

== Burial ==

As with most finds of this type , it remains unclear as to why the objects were placed within the barrow , though several plausible reasons have been proposed . Taylor argues that the ring @-@ barrow in which the objects were found was likely the site of a pagan temple , and that , based on an analysis of the surviving inscription (see below) , they were part of a votive hoard indicative of a still @-@ active paganism . Though this theory has been largely ignored , later research , notably that of Looijenga (1997) , has observed that all of the remaining objects in the hoard possess a " definite ceremonial character " . Particularly noteworthy in this connection is the Patera , or libation dish , which is decorated with depictions of (probably Germanic) deities .

Those in favour of viewing the objects as the personal hoard of Athanaric suggest that the gold was buried in an attempt to hide it from the Huns , who had defeated the Gothic Greuthungi north of the Black Sea and began moving down into Thervingian Dacia around 375 . However , it remains unclear why the gold would have remained buried , as Athanaric 's treaty with Theodosius I (380) enabled him to bring his tribesmen under the protection of Roman rule prior to his death in 381 . Other researchers have suggested that the hoard was that of an Ostrogothic king , with Rusu (1984) specifically identifying Gainnas , a Gothic general in the Roman army who was killed by the Huns around 400 , as the owner of the hoard . Although this would help explain why the hoard remained buried , it fails to account for the conspicuous ring @-@ barrow having been chosen as the site to hide such a large and valuable treasure .

== Date ==

Various dates for the burial of the hoard have been proposed , largely derived from considerations regarding the origin of the objects themselves and their manner of burial , though the inscription has also been an important factor (see below) . Taylor suggests a range from 210 to 250 . In more recent studies , scholars have proposed slightly later dates , with supporters of the Athanaric theory suggesting the end of the 4th century , the date also proposed by Constantinescu , and Tomescu suggesting the early 5th century .

== Inscription ==

== Reconstruction and interpretation ==

The gold ring bears an Elder Futhark runic inscription of 15 characters , with the 7th (probably ? / o /) having been mostly destroyed when the ring was cut in half by thieves . The damaged rune has been the object of some scholarly debate , and is variously interpreted as indicating ? / j / (Reichert 1993 , Nedoma 1993) or possibly ? / s / (Looijenga 1997) . If the photograph of the Arundel Society is to be taken as a guide , then the inscription originally read as follows :

gutaniowi hailag
????????? ??????

This reading was followed by early scholars , notably Taylor , who translates " dedicated hailag to the temple ? @-@ w? (h) of the Goths Gutan? " , and Diculescu (1923) , who translates " sacred (hailag) to the Jove (iow? , i.e. Thor) of the Goths gutan (?) " . Düwel (2001) , commenting upon the same reading , suggests interpreting ? as indicative of ? [pal] thus :

gutaniowi ? [pal] w? [h] hailag

This , following Krause (1966) , translates as " sacred w? (h) (and) inviolable hailag inheritance ? (pal) of the Goths gutan? " . Other scholars have interpreted the ? as indicative of a feminine ending : Johnsen (1971) translates " the holy hailag relic w? (h) (= the [altar] ring) of Gothic

priestesses gutani? " ; Krogmann (1978) , reading ? / m / for ?? / wi / , translates " dedicated hailag to the Gothic Mothers gutaniom (= female guardian spirits of the Goths) " ; Antonsen (2002) translates " sacrosanctum w? (h) hailag of gothic women / female warriors gutani? " . Construing the damaged rune as ? / s / , Looijenga (1997) reads :

gutan?s w? [h] hailag

She comments that gutan?s should be understood as an early form of Gothic gutaneis , " Gothic " , and w? [h] as early Gothic weih , " sanctuary " . Following this reading , she translates the whole inscription " Gothic (object) . Sacrosanct . " Reichert (1993) suggests that it is also possible to read the damaged rune as ? / j / , and interprets it as representative of j [?ra] , thus :

gutan? j [era] w? [h] hailag

Reichert translates this as " (good) year j (era) of the Goths gutan? , sacred w? (h) (and) inviolable hailag " . Though Düwel (2001) has expressed doubts regarding the meaning of such a statement , Nordgren (2004) supports Reichert 's reading , viewing the ring as connected to a sacral king in his role of ensuring an abundant harvest (represented by ? jera) . Pieper (2003) reads the damaged rune as ? / ? / , thus :

gutan? [i (ng)] wi [n] hailag

He translates this " [to] Ingwin of the Goths . Holy . "

= = = Meaning = = =

Despite the lack of consensus regarding the exact import of the inscription , scholars seem to agree that its language is some form of Gothic and that the intent behind it was religious . Taylor interprets the inscription as being clearly pagan in nature and indicative of the existence of a temple to which the ring was a votive offering . He derives his date for the burial (210 to 250) from the fact that the Christianizing of the Goths along the Danube is generally considered to have been almost complete within a few generations after their having arrived there in 238 . Though paganism among the Goths did survive the initial conversion phase of 250 to 300 - as the martyring of the converted Christian Goths Wereka , Batwin (370) and Sabbas (372) at the hands of the indigenously pagan Goths (in the latter case Athanaric) shows - it was weakened considerably in the following years , and the likelihood of such a deposit being made would have been greatly diminished .

MacLeod and Mees (2006) , following Mees (2004) , interpret the ring as possibly representing either a " temple @-@ ring " or a " sacred oath @-@ ring " , the existence of which in pagan times is documented in Old Norse literature and archaeological finds . Furthermore , they suggest that the inscription could be proof of the existence of ' mother goddess ' worship among the Goths - echoing the well @-@ documented worship of ' mother goddesses ' in other parts of the Germanic North . MacLeod and Mees also propose that the appearance of both of the Common Germanic terms denoting " holiness " (w?h and hailag) may help to clarify the distinction between the two concepts in the Gothic language , implying that the ring was considered holy , not only for its being connected to one or more divinities , but also in and of itself .