

ON THE TRACK OF THE ANCESTORS OF THE SCALVIANS. THE REMAINS OF THE MIGRATION PERIOD CEMETERY AT TILSIT

WOJCIECH NOWAKOWSKI

Abstract

The Early Medieval Scalva region, situated on the Lower Neman,^{*} was, it seems, already relatively densely populated in the Migration Period. The concentration of Migration Period cemeteries on the eastern outskirts of the later city of Tilsit might indicate this. The Am Philosophengang necropolis was one of these sites. Completely unknown until recently, the cemetery is now being 'rediscovered' on the basis of archive records.

Key words: archaeology, Scalva, Scalvians, Migration Period, Lower Neman.

In the research carried out by Vladas Žulkus, who celebrates his jubilee this year, archaeological studies of the west coast of Lithuania (Žulkus 2003), the history of the development of Klaipėda (Žulkus 1994), and the history of the Curonians (Žulkus 2000; 2004; 2006a) predominate. Also, his research into the Scalvians (Žulkus 2000, p.101), or more specifically studies of the prehistory of the valley of the Lower Neman, raises important issues that sometimes lead to far-reaching and surprising, and even controversial, conclusions (Žulkus 2004, Figs. 1-2; 2006b).

This course of investigations into Scalva in the Lower Neman is an important continuation of the discoveries and research carried out in the 19th century and at the beginning of the 20th century around Tilsit (now Sovetsk). That city had a special position on the map of Germany: the multi-cultural and multi-national character of the population of the city and of its surroundings used to attract the German intellectual elite, which can be seen, for instance, in the short stories dating from that time written by Hermann Sudermann (1921). Tilsit simultaneously played a very specific role in the development of Lithuanian culture, as it was the seat of the Litauische Literarische Gesellschaft. This association came into being in 1879, and at the beginning it had only a few members, mainly Germans, not Lithuanians. It flourished between 1899 and 1918, when it was chaired for the first time by a Lithuanian, Alexander Kurschat, a professor at a gymnasium in Tilsit and the author of a German-Lithuanian dictionary (Forstreuter 1971, p.62ff) which was published after his death. After the First World War, a dispute arose about the land located on the Lower Neman, an example of which in archaeology could be the booklet written in a hysterical tone by E. Hollack (1919), which thwarted the chance for the further development of the association, which

was regarded as an organisation of Lithuanian nationalists by the Germans, and as a clique of collaborators by the Lithuanians. This situation led to the association's voluntary dissolution in 1927 (Kurschat 1928).

The Litauische Literarische Gesellschaft focused mainly on research into linguistics and folklore, this way contributing to the Lithuanian national revival. Despite this fact, it collected a small but rather interesting collection of antiquities, most of which were found in the environs of Tilsit (cf. Hoffheinz 1887, p.426ff; 1889, p.195). After the dissolution of the association, it was moved to the Prussia-Museum in Königsberg, and then, together with the rest of the Prussia-Museum collection, it was lost in the turmoil of the war.

In this situation, all information concerning archaeological discoveries¹ in Tilsit and its area are interesting, especially as the finds seem to form a distinct concentration. Emil Hollack, the author of a monumental catalogue of archaeological sites in the former East Prussia which was published in 1908, mentions numerous sites dating from the Bronze Age and the Early Middle Ages which were situated in Tilsit or around the city (Hollack 1908, pp.165-166; cf. Grenz 1971, p.36). We should add to the last group an inhumation cemetery in Splitter, a western suburb of Tilsit (Hollack 1908,

* In Lithuanian this river is called the Nemunas; the lower reaches of the river are known as Memel (DEMERECKAS, K. Memelis – Klaipėdos vardas. In: V. ŽULKUS, ed. *Vakarų baltų istorija ir kultūra*, II. Klaipėda, p.34ff). Editorial note.

¹ I would like to thank all my colleagues who have helped me with searching for archive materials referring to the finds discussed in this paper, and have made them available for publication: Prof. Wilfried Menghin, Prof. Mathias Wemhoff, Horst Junker MA and Horst Wieder MA from Museum für Vor- und Frühgeschichte in Berlin, Arnis Rādiņš PhD and Jānis Ciglis MA, from Latvijas Nacionālais vēstures muzejs in Rīga.

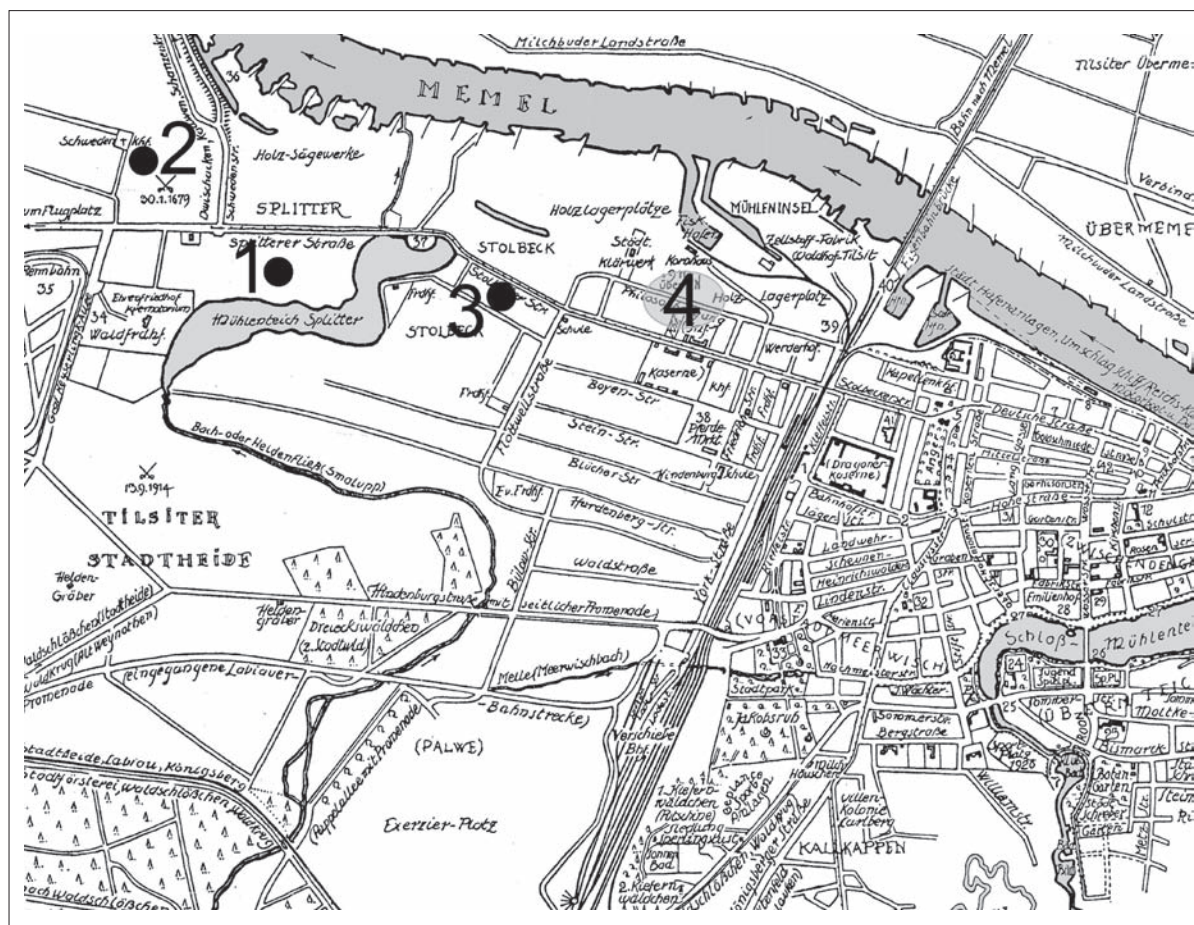


Fig. 1. Cemeteries on the western outskirts of Tilsit: 1 Tilsit Splitter, Am Schwedenfriedhof; 2 Tilsit-Splitter, Am Mühlenenteich; 3 Tilsit, Stolbeckerstraße 99; 4 the approximate location of the Tilsit-Splitter cemetery Am Philosophengang.

p.154). Hollack also mentions some finds dating from the Roman Period and the Migration Period: attention should be paid to the eye fibula which was discovered on the western outskirts of the city ('Hakenfibel, Zeit: B, vom westlichen Stadtende', Hollack 1908, p.166; cf. Grenz 1971, p.37).

The concentration of archaeological sites on the western outskirts of the city, in the suburbs of Stolbeck and Splitter more to the west, around the lower reaches and the mouth of a small river, which even in the interwar period had the Baltic name of Smolupp[e] (now Uzkaja/Узкая), is especially interesting. In this area, a Medieval inhumation cemetery mentioned by Hollack (1908, p.154) was located (Fig. 1.1), situated in those days by a millpond ('Am Mühlenenteich'), which was studied relatively quickly and published (Peiser 1909; Peiser, Luckmann 1919). Less well-known are two other sites, which were investigated in the 1930s. One of them is a necropolis in Stolbeck discovered near the main street in the outskirts, and later included within the borders of the city (Fig. 1.2). This site is called Stolbecker-Straße 99 in literature. Unfortunately, it is known only from a few short notices, which hopefully allow us to date it to

the Late Roman Period and the Migration Period (*Neue Bodenfunde* 1936a, p.238; Waetzoldt, Urbanek 1937, p.76; Waetzoldt 1939, p.119, Fig. 7).

Even less information has been available for years about the multi-phase cemetery Am Schwedenfriedhof (Fig. 1.3) in Splitter (cf. *Neue Bodenfunde* 1936b, p.33; Bohnsack 1938, p.29). Excerpts from excavation documentation that are accessible now in a discovered part of the Fundarchiv of the Prussia-Museum in Königsberg allow us to establish that the necropolis was founded in the Early Roman Period, and was in use until the Middle Ages (Nowakowski 2006).

The discoveries described show that on the eastern outskirts of Tilsit, in the suburbs called Stolbeck and Splitter, the relatively dense and stable settlement that has been dated to the first millennium AD should be taken into account. In this context, even limited information which suggests the presence of another site in this region dating from this period of prehistory is important. Discoveries of this kind were documented in the archive of Felix Jakobson. This young Latvian archaeologist, who died a violent and early death (Cigliš 2009), was preparing a doctoral dissertation in the 1920s on

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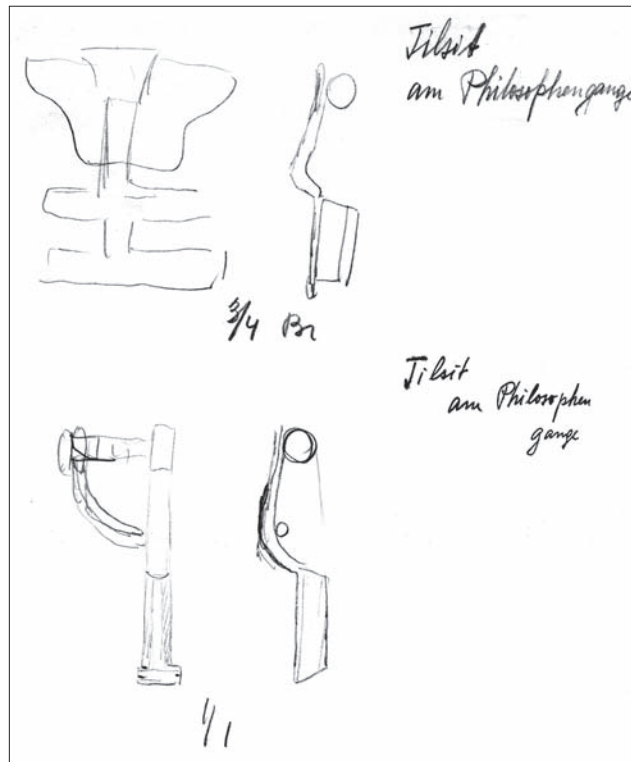


Fig. 2. A card from Jakobson's archive with sketches of the *Schlusskreuzfibel* and the so-called *Armbrustsprossenfibel* from Tilsit (Am Philosophengang).

two Masurian cemeteries in Tumiany and Kielary dating from the Late Migration Period (Jakobson 2009), and for the purpose of his work he prepared a large file which includes finds from the Late Roman Period and the Migration Period discovered in regions located far beyond Masuria (Bitner-Wróblewska 1999).

Out of the several hundred record cards from Felix Jakobson's archive, there are two which contain very schematic drawings of brooches discovered in the western part of Tilsit. On the first card, there are only sketches of two brooches, without any precise information, apart from the caption 'Tilsit, am Philosophengange', which indicates that they were found on a plot near that small street, on the western outskirts of the city (Fig. 1.3). On the basis of Jakobson's methods for preparing his files, we can assume that the finds were stored in the Prussia-Museum in Königsberg. The first documented brooch is the *Schlusskreuzfibel* (cf. Åberg 1919, p.120ff, Figs. 173-179). Despite the fact that the drawing is schematic, it can be stated that the brooch has a faceted foot ending with a metope decorated with a slanting cross and a massive metope on its head (Fig. 1.2). This allows us to treat it as a later version of *Schlusskreuzfibel*, and to date it to the end of phase E₁ and phase E_{2a} of the Migration Period, so approximately to the sixth century (cf. Rudnicki 2008, p.295, Fig. 3).

The second brooch sketched on the same card is the *Armbrustsprossenfibel* (Fig. 2.2), which probably presents a late version with a long *Sprossen*, a trapezoidal plate on a head and with an imitation of spring cord made of metal sheet. Such brooches should be dated to the final part of the Late Migration Period (the end of phase E_{2b} and phase E₃, Rudnicki 2008, pp.297-298), which corresponds to the seventh century or even the beginning of the eighth century (cf. Brather 2001).

On the second card from Jakobson's archive, we find a very slightly more thorough description of the find: 'am Philosophengange, Streufund'. The inventory number of the Prussia-Museum was also noted, V 7226, which lets us assume that documented finds were added to the collection at the end of the 19th century. An additional note 'Baron Prinzsche Slg., Samland' suggests that before that, they were kept in the private collection of a landowner, an enthusiast for antiquities. On the card, there is a very schematic drawing of the late version of *Armbrustsprossenfibel* (Fig. 3), similar to the specimen illustrated on the previous card. A note under the drawing 'Bügel von solcher' indicates that a piece of another brooch representing the mentioned version from the collection of the mysterious baron-archaeologist was donated to the Prussia-Museum.

Simple annotations on the cards from Jakobson's archive do not permit us to determine unambiguously the

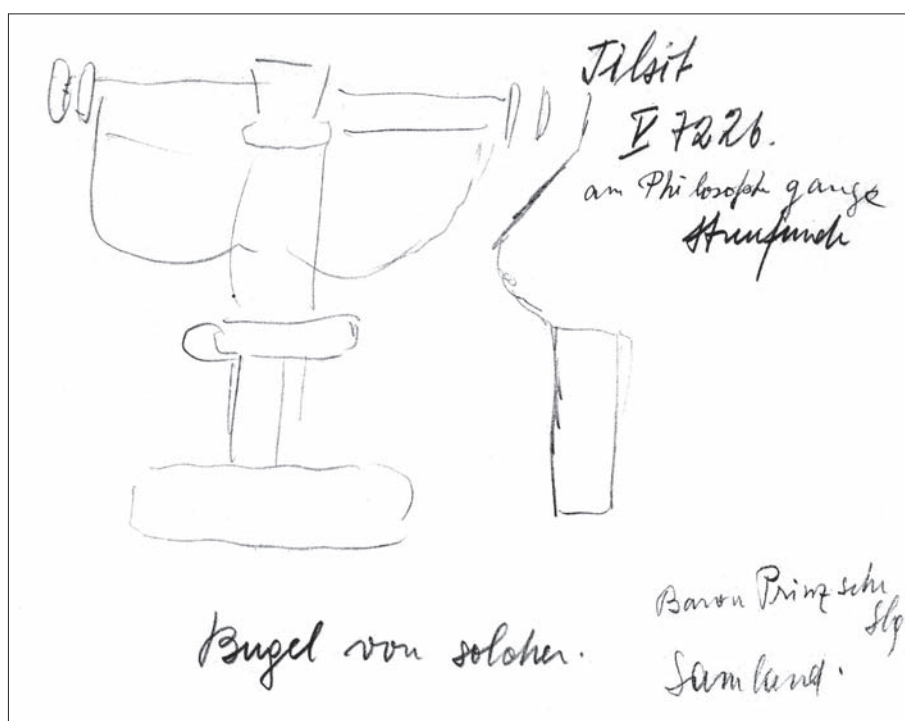


Fig. 3. A card from Jakobson's archive with a sketch of the *Armbrustsprossenfibel* from Tilsit (Am Philosophengang).

origin of the four brooches mentioned. However, it can be assumed that if the term '*am Philosophengang*' was used on both cards, the brooches were discovered near each other, probably at the same site dating from the Migration Period located near that street. It was presumably a cemetery, as it is hard to expect a chance discovery of as many as four brooches in one settlement.

A confirmation of this hypothesis can be found in the preserved part of the Fundarchiv of the Prussia-Museum. In a note made in 1938, a previous discovery of a cemetery '*am Philosophengang*' was mentioned (in 1883), with skeleton graves furnished with bronze necklaces, bracelets and figurines (Fundarchiv, № 683/Tilsit-Stadt, Bd. 2/19). One of the bracelets was better described, as a specimen ending with transverse plates. It cannot be excluded that this was the specimen published a little earlier with the annotation '*bei Tilsit*' (Fig. 4, Gaerte 1929, Fig. 268.c), which presents a local form which existed in the Lower Neman region in the Late Migration Period (cf. Engel 1931, p.38, Fig. 8.e; Vaitkunskienė 1995, p.129, Fig. 188.1).

One of the graves also yielded '*ein eisernes Schwert mit breitem Rücken*', probably a single-edged sword with a massive blade back, analogous to specimens existing on a large scale on sites dating from the Late Migration Period on the Samland Peninsula and in Nantangen (Berendt 1873, pp.10-11, pl. I.9a; Klebs 1877, p.53, pl. I:5; Kulakov 1990, p.69, pl. XIX:7), as well as in the Elbląg Group (Dorr 1898, pp.15-16, pl. I:16, 21-

22) and in Early Medieval cemeteries situated on the Lower Neman and on the coast of Lithuania at the end of the Late Migration Period and the beginning of the Middle Ages (Engel 1931, p.38, Fig. 8g; Kazakevičius 1988, pp.93-96, 99-104, Figs. 37.2-8, 38, 41, 43; map XVI).

In the same note, two brooches found in the '*am Philosophengang*' cemetery were mentioned. One of them was described enigmatically as a specimen '*mit oberer Sehne, Spiral- und Nadelhülse*', which does not allow for any speculation about its classification. The second one, however, was described as a '*Sprossenfibel*', so probably this was the *Armbrustsprossenfibel*, analogous to the two specimens documented in Jakobson's archive.

In the preserved part of the Fundarchiv from the former Prussia-Museum, there is also a note made in 1942 about a fragment of a bronze brooch '*Achse einer bronzenen Fibel, etwas im Feuer verschmolzen*' (Fundarchiv № 683/Tilsit-Stadt, Bd. 2/26), handed over to the museum in Tilsit that was found near the street called Philosophengang. It is possible that this find came from the same site, but any attempt to determine the type of brooch it is is hopeless.

Here we have to recall a brooch mentioned by Hollack, dating from the Early Roman Period, found '*vom westlichen Stadtende*' (Hollack 1908, p.166), so maybe also in the vicinity of the street called Philosophengang.



Fig. 4. A bronze bracelet with transverse plates found 'bei Tilsit' (after Gaerte 1929, Fig. 268c).

To sum up, we can accept that all the finds mentioned were found on one site, 'Am Philosophengang'. This was probably a cemetery which was presumably destroyed towards the end of the 19th century. Repeated chance discoveries made on a relatively densely built-up area indicate this. It seems that a precise determination of the extent or the period of existence of the cemetery will probably not be possible. The chronological frameworks of the nearby Schwedenfriedhof and Stolbecker-Straße 99 sites indeed allow us to guess that the hypothetical 'Am Philosophengang' necropolis could have been founded as early as the (Early?) Roman Period, and was in use until the beginning of the Early Middle Ages, but there are no premises to support such a risky theory. However, it seems quite certain that, as in the case of the two neighbouring necropolises, the most extensive development of the 'Am Philosophengang' cemetery took place in the Late Migration Period.

There is also no doubt that in the Migration Period a great concentration of settlement took place in the region described, which created the basis for the later development of Early Medieval Scalva (cf. Engel 1935, pp.100-101, 120, Fig. 54; Sedov 1987, pp.409-411; Powierski 2004, p.157ff) as a Prussian tribal territory, and simultaneously as an important political and economic centre on the east Baltic coast (Jankuhn 1952, p.12ff).

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SKALVIŲ PROTĖVIŲ PĒDSAKAIS. TAUTŲ KRAUSTYMOŠI LAIKOTARPIO KAPINYNŲ LIEKANOS PRIE TILŽĒS

WOJCIECH NOWAKOWSKI

Santrauka

Tilžės miesto ribose ir priemiesčiuose XX a. pradžioje buvo užfiksuota daug archeologinių gyvenviečių, tarp jų ir kapinynų, datuojamų tautų kraustymosi laikotarpiu, buvusių vakariniame miesto pakraštyje, prie Smolupės (Uzkaja) žiočių, kur ji įteka į Nemuną. Vienas iš nekropolių – „Stolbecker-Straße 99“ – datuojamas romėniškuoju ir tautų kraustymosi laikotarpiu. Kita gyvenvietė, literatūroje minima kaip „Am Schwedenfriedhof“, buvo įkurta vėlyvuoju romėniškuoju laikotarpiu ir gyvavo iki viduramžių (2–4 pav.).

Šiuolaikiniai archyviniai duomenys rodo, kad šiame regione būta ir kito kapinyno, datuojamo tautų kraustymosi laikotarpiu. Jis buvo minimas netoli gatvės, XX a. pradžioje vadinamos *Philosophengang*. Felix Jakobson archyve yra nupieštos trys segės. Viena jų įvardyta „Schlußkreuzfibel“, datuojama E1 periodo pabaiga ir E_{2a} laikotarpiu, apytikriai VI amžiumi. Kitos dvi segės vadinamos „Armbrustsprossenfibeln“ su ilga „Sprossen“ – trapecine plokštele ant galvutės, su imituota susukta kojele, pagaminta iš metalinės vielos. Šios segės gali būti datuojamos vėlyvuoju tautų kraustymosi laikotarpiu (E_{2b} ir E₃ periodai, kurie atitinka VII a. ir VIII a. pradžią). F. Jakobson mini ir daugiau tokių

segių fragmentų, rastų tikriausiai toje pačioje vietoje. F. Jakobson nustatytos vietos atitinka kapinyną, įvardijamą „Am Philosophengang“, kuris minimas Prūsijos muziejaus archyve. Kaip tik šiame kapinyne aptikti radiniai datuojami tautų kraustymosi laikotarpiu. Koncentracija trijų kapinynų, įvardijamų „Stolbeckerstraße 99“, „Am Schwedenfriedhof“ ir „Am Philosophengang“, rodo, kad tautų kraustymosi laikotarpiu ši tankiai gyvenama vietovė Nemuno žemupyje galėjo priklausyti ankstyvųjų viduramžių skalviams kaip viena iš Prūsijos genčių teritorijų, dariusių didelę politinę ir ekonominę įtaką rytiniame Baltijos jūros pakraštyje.

Vertė Algirdas Girininkas