

MINDAUGAS BERTAŠIUS. CENTRAL LITHUANIA IN THE EIGHTH TO THE TWELFTH CENTURIES

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This book deals with prehistoric central Lithuania. It is one of the few studies whose subject is the prehistory of a single tribe or region. It consists of 12 chapters, in which the climate, peculiarities of the soil, and the development of the region in Roman times and the great migration are reviewed. The largest part of it covers the Viking era, outlines the region within the entire world of the Baltic tribes, and shows its importance on the eve of the formation of the state.

In the preface to the book, the author explains, why “central Lithuania” is more appropriate than “Aukštaitija” (Upland Lithuania). He does not go into the disputes about the size of Upland Lithuania, though several times he points out that the cemeteries of central Lithuania belong to the Upland Lithuanians. His attitude towards the boundaries of the territory is similar, based on exceptional culture. For the above, he employs not only material from explored cemeteries with graves belonging to the same culture, but hill-forts as well. Though prior to this, he writes that the hill-forts of the region are not explored. Even if they were, they would hardly differ from those of other regions in the period discussed.

The chronological framework of the book is the eighth to the 12th centuries. The beginning of the period is identified with the start of the Viking invasions, and cultural, social and economic changes in Scandinavia and the Baltic region, while the end is linked to the beginning of Lithuania’s transition into a state. Thus, the main subject of the book is the region of central Lithuania in the Viking period. The author also pays much attention to the Roman period, represented by abundant cemeteries from the time. One more factor is favourable: most of them are already explored. The rich material culture of the region shows that local communities were involved in regional activity, due to which the inhabitants of the Kaunas area are attached to the cultural circle of the eastern Balts. The author presumes that the inhabitants of the Kaunas area and the eastern Balts are akin to each other. Abundant imported articles (bronze and silver) prove that trading relations were active. The author tries to imagine the possible items of trade. Probably he liked the idea of Wojciech Nowakowski that the population of central Lithuania could be importing items which the inhabit-

ants of the Lower Vistula, directly connected with the “amber trade-route”, were short of. The assumption is made that these could be slaves. Shortly after, he notes logically that we lack arguments for the above assumption. At the same time, he thinks that a well-armed community could maraud and capture people from neighbouring tribes. It is hard to agree with this assumption, in particular when we know that brass articles are also abundant among the other Baltic communities. According to this assumption by the author, the latter also “captured people from other tribes” to turn them into slaves and to sell. Thus, it would mean that slaves from the Baltic world came in large numbers. This kind of “abundance” would be described in written sources from the period. We have the opposite.

A significant part of the book is devoted to the cultural particularity of the region, including the development of cremation traditions and ritual horse offering, as one of the attributes characterising central Lithuania. The author employs a wide range of material from cemeteries in central Lithuania, but the most attention is paid to Marvelė cemetery, where he explored over 400 cremations. He tries to answer the question, where the cremation tradition in central Lithuania came from. Was it from the east, as R. Volkaitė-Kulikauskienė presumes (Lietuvių tautybės ištakos. Archeologijos duomenys. In: *Lietuvių etnogenezė*. Vilnius, 1987, p. 155), or southwest Europe, as proposed by A. Tautavičius (A. Tautavičius. Archeologinės kultūrinės sritys. In: *Lietuvių etnogenezė*. Vilnius, 1987, p. 136,139)? The author is inclined to believe it came from the west Baltic tribes, firstly from the Sudovians and the Przeworsk cultural region (p. 71).

The book emphasises the particularity of central Lithuania. The author thinks that around modern-day Kaunas, in Viking times, an administrative centre and a marketplace, where different cultures intersected, could have existed, though at the same time he admits that such a centre has not yet been identified archaeologically. The author’s contemplations about the region of central Lithuania on the eve of the formation of the state are interesting. He envisages all kinds of preconditions for the appearance of the state in the 11th and 12th centuries (the hierarchical structure of settlements, specialised handicrafts, the professional military structure);

that is to say, this is already the first step, according to the author, on the way to the formation of the state. He also insists upon the Vikings' role in the appearance of such a structure. In previous literature the attitude dominated that the example of ancient Russia was very significant for the appearance of Lithuania as a state (R. Volkaitė-Kulikauskienė. *Lietuviai IX-XIII a.* Vilnius, 1970, p. 44). Isn't the trend of an "example" in the formation of a state becoming a matter of fashion? It is evident that such a finding could be disputed. Central Lithuania, that is, the Upland Lithuanians, was not the only tribe to be very close to founding a state in the 11th and 12th centuries. Almost all the Baltic tribes in this period were close to it, but only one of them made the fateful step.

Bertašius' book is the first, and, I would say, a successful study about the prehistory of this region. I think it will be acknowledged by the academic community, young people studying, and everyone who is interested in their own history.

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