

M. MICHELBERTAS. CORPUS DER RÖMISCHEN FUNDE IM
EUROPÄISCHEN BARBARICUM. LITAUEN.

Vilnius: Universität Vilnius, Lehrstuhl für Archäologie, 2001. 68 S.
Taf. 11, Karte

Books by Lithuanian authors in a foreign language are rare in the archaeological world. Feeling more as inhabitants of a European province rather than patriots of our own country, we still hesitate to present the results of our research in other languages which are popular and widely used in the international academic community. A welcome exception is this new study, which has recently reached its readers. The author is a famous Lithuanian archaeologist, head of the Department of Archaeology at Vilnius University, Professor Mykolas Michelbertas, who has dedicated all his scientific talent to old Iron Age exploration, collecting in driblets, and accumulating information about the seemingly distant Roman Empire, its provinces and the relations of the Baltic tribes with it. He has produced over 350 scientific and popular articles, and several large studies on the exploration of archaeological monuments¹.

All known artefacts of Roman material culture (over 100 items), and around 1,000 coins from the Roman Empire, discovered in Lithuanian archaeological sites (barrow cemeteries and burial grounds, hill-forts, settlements and hoards) are collected and presented in his book. These abundant and very valuable archaeological sources are registered, analysed and interpreted, and are presented to all researchers involved in studies on “barbarian” European countries. Consequently, the author presents the material in German, providing it with exhaustive explanations, as some material could be problematic for a wider circle of German readers to perceive, though it is routine for our archaeologists.

This book is a part of a big international scientific project, which also involves other European countries that were not a part of the Roman Empire but experienced its direct cultural and economic influence. This is European *Barbaricum* or *Germania libera*. Modern Lithuania, a remote backwater of the European barbarian world in those days, is one such area.

The structure of the book is well balanced and arranged logically. It consists of a preface, an introduction, a catalogue, a list of localities, pictures and a map.

The idea of the book and the story of its birth are dis-

cussed in the preface, naming the people directly concerned and the financial sources.

The first written sources by ancient historians about the Aistians are presented in the introduction. Readers are introduced to *Germania* by Tacitus, familiar to all archaeologists and researchers of ancient times, in which he provides information about the territories and life-style of the Aistians (Balts), and about facts from Pliny on direct trading relations with the Roman Empire and the amber route, which existed for a few centuries. Due to this route, the names of Aistian tribes became familiar and are mentioned separately in subsequent written sources. These are the Galindians, Sudovians and Selonians. Readers are introduced to the term “Balts”, which was proposed by the German linguist Georg Nesselmann in the middle of the 19th century. It is followed by a short introduction to former ethnic-cultural areas in modern Lithuania.

Explanations to the book are put in a separate chapter. They provide us with information about the administrative division of Lithuania, including the names of district centres and regions, about the introduction of the exploration and collection of archaeological artefacts, the beginning of professional museology, and the fate of collections (in particular from western Lithuania) during the Second World War and after it. The author analyses the population of modern Lithuania, and its expansion since the beginning of the Iron Age. Numbers of imported articles increased together with the increase in the population. Artefacts are more abundant in sites where the population density is higher. This chapter provides a list of references, abbreviations and tables of illustrations.

The catalogue makes up the largest part of the book. It is designed on the basis of the latest administrative division of the Republic of Lithuania – the districts and regions. It will be useful for researchers, as some foreign archaeologists have a poor understanding of the division and the smaller territorial units of the country. A lot of room is given to the coins of the Roman Empire. Alongside glass and enamel beads, they make up the largest part of finds. At the moment, over 100 find sites, with over 1,000 Roman coins, have been discov-

¹ A. Tautavičius. Mykolo Michelberto bibliografija (1961–1998).

ered in Lithuania. It was not difficult for the author to arrange a catalogue of coins, as an article by him on the subject has recently appeared². He draws the attention of readers to the fact that Roman coins in graves are typical of the cemeteries of the western Balts. It separates them from other analogous monuments of barbarian Europe.

The catalogue introduces other spare artefacts of Roman origin, including the circumstances of their finding, dates, thorough descriptions of artefacts and other items discovered together, references and conservation sites.

The book is provided with one specific chapter which is not usually typical of similar publications. It is dedicated to Lithuanian transcription. No doubt, this is a positive feature of the book, as foreign scholars distort the place-names beyond recognition, having no idea how to read them properly.

The book is illustrated with pictures professionally drawn by I. Maciukaitė. Unfortunately, they are not too numerous. It would have been worth introducing more pictures of items, despite their poor condition.

This book is valuable for several aspects: 1) material about the Iron Age in Lithuania has never before been presented so broadly to readers in a foreign language; 2) it penetrates a pan-European readership, and assists in the better understanding of the economic-cultural influence of the Roman Empire on the Baltic tribes. Henceforth, the Baltic area will no longer remain a blank spot on the archaeological map of European cultures.

It is hard to evaluate critically the work of a person who has spent all his life, consistently and purposefully, exploring the material culture of the Iron Age in Lithuania. This is a professional and mature work; therefore, we can only express our admiration regarding the accuracy of Professor Michelbertas, and wish him further success in researching his favourite area.

Vytautas Kazakevičius

² Michelbertas M., *Römische Münzen in der Gräberfeldern Litauens*. In: *Archaeologia Baltica*. Vilnius, 1995 81–87.