

# Some Notes on the Contacts Between Gotland and the East Baltic Area

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One of Gotland's closest neighbours is the East Baltic area where the Curonian coast is the first land you meet when sailing eastwards. There are signs of contacts throughout the ancient times, but I am not the right person to go into Bronze Age or Early Iron Age details. I will only make some comparative notes on the Viking period (and the following phase), concerning the artefact material in Gotland and the East Baltic Area.

## **Combs**

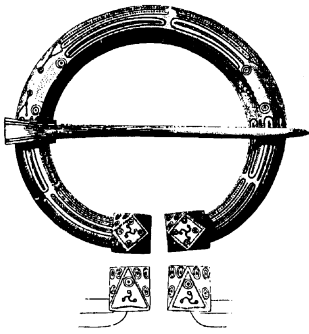
Combs in cases appear in the middle of the 10th century in Gotland (also in Birka). At the time they are always found in men's graves. Later, however, other types of case-combs may be used by the Gotlandic women (post-Birka period, or 11th-12th century). In the East Baltic Area women seem to have used case-combs earlier than in Gotland.

## **Penannular brooches**

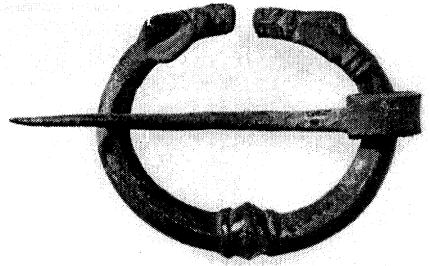
There are no signs of penannular brooches in graves until around the beginning of the 10th century in Gotland (or in Birka). When they appear they are of the same types as you can find in the East Baltic area, for instance the type with a sturdy ring and faceted terminals with stamped ornamentation (Fig. 1).

In the later Viking Age there are local Gotlandic types, for instance with animal heads with flap ears (Fig. 2).

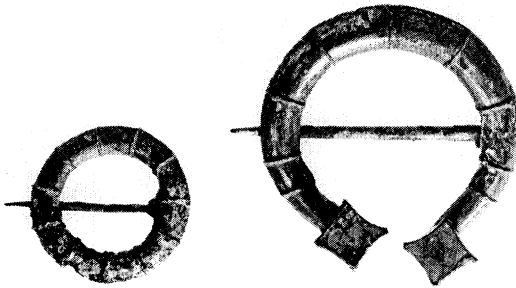
In Gotland there are also imported brooches, for instance the type with transversal ribs. Those ribs appear on penannular brooches as well as on annular ones – both types can be seen in grave 197 from Havor in the S of Gotland (Fig. 3). In Gotland the ribbed brooches each amount to 15–20 respectively. A less common type in Gotland, where only about 3 examples are known, is the one shown in fig. 4, which I believe is quite familiar to Lithuanian archaeologists. We also have a range of different brooches with turned-back animal heads and other types, which seem to have been manufactured in the East Baltic area; in addition to those terminals the true or false torsion seems to have been imported to Gotland (Fig. 5).



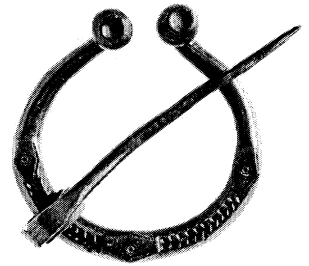
**Fig. 1.** Penannular brooch. Gotland, Hamra parish, SHM 6663.



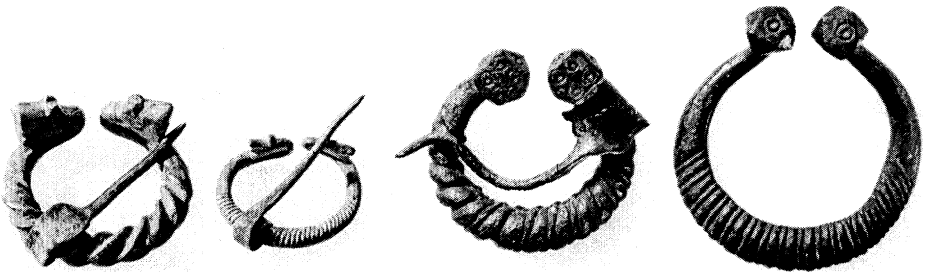
**Fig. 2.** Penannular brooch. Gotland, Halla parish, SHM 3321. Photo U. Bruxe.



**Fig. 3.** Penannular brooch and annular brooch. Gotland, Hablingbo parish, Havor cemetery, grave 197, SHM 8064:197. Photo U. Bruxe.



**Fig. 4.** Penannular brooch. Gotland, Gothem parish, SHM 16703. Photo M. Stranger.



**Fig. 5.** Penannular brooches. Gotland, Othem parish, SHM 10218; Hejdeby parish, SHM 1850; Fide parish, SHM 15513; Bro parish, 16148. Photo B. Lundberg.

Certain types seem to have been common for both Gotland and the East Baltic area, for instance the flat ones with a profiled 'crown' (Thunmark-Nylén 1992a: fig. 5–6). The type is present also in Lithuania in another local shape (Nagevičius 1935: fig. 12; Kuncienė 1972: 29 pav. 6). – As a matter of fact there is one brooch of this type of Latvian production that has been found in Gotland as well! (Thunmark-Nylén 1998: Taf. 110:8).

I do not know whether the brooches with poppy terminals (Mohnkopfenden) were imported from here to Gotland or made in both places – probably both, but at least some (such as the one in fig. 4) travelled over the water.

## Belts

Belts with rich metal fittings appear in the graves about the same time as the penannular brooches in Gotland. During the 10th century they are equipped occasionally with a tassel of thin leather strings with bronze spirals and strap-end mounts – the tassel has usually 6 or rather 8 strings (Thunmark-Nylén 1995, Abb. 195 b). This kind of tassel belt has also been found in various graves in Latvia and Lithuania (for instance Apala & Apals 1992, fig 5:3–6; Nagevičius 1935, fig. on p. 50; Šnore 1987, VIII tab.) – However, the East Baltic fashion with small rings at the lower edge of the belt does not appear in Gotland.

Many buckles and strap mounts are in many respects of the same type in Gotland and the East Baltic area, when we come a bit further in the chronology. However, to some extent it is possible to single out the local production. The very common mount with thin ornamental strips is different in small details, for instance how the strips are put on to the mount – the Gotlanders put the strips as a bent U (Thunmark-Nylén 1995, Abb. 61, 260 and others), while the East Baltic craftsmen often put the strips along the edges and following the mount's bend around the axis (Tōnisson 1974, Abb. 20:1–3, Taf. XII:9).

The later Gotlandic belts have rows of small cast ornamentation studs and other types of buckles (Thunmark-Nylén 1995, Abb. 83 and others). Often the buckles and strap dividers are in openwork with animal heads or palmettes in rune-stone style (Thunmark-Nylén 1995, Abb. 78–79, 83). Buckles and strap-dividers of the same main type has been manufactured in the East Baltic area as well, but here the animal heads more often are transformed to plant-like or abstract ornaments (Zariņa 1992, Abb. 10:1–2).

## Women's brooches

Disc-on-bow-brooches have been found in the Grobina graves. They seem to have been manufactured in Gotland in the 8th century (Nerman 1958). A certain disc-on-bow brooch (which I have seen exhibited in the Museum in Riga in 1990) has been adapted as a 'chain brooch' – the normal use of these brooches in their homeland Gotland was to wear them horizontally under the chin in the cape, but this one has been used vertically with the chains hanging down from the broad end.

A small number of box brooches of Gotlandic manufacture have been found in the coastal region of the East Baltic area and East Prussia. The brooches belong to the manufacture of the 8th – 9th century (for instance Nerman 1958, Taf. 5:34, 15:81; Kuncienė 1972: 29, pav., 1; Kulakov 1994, 1 pav., 7, 41).

One of the latest box brooches in Latvia was found in a grave at Laukskola together with a pair of Gotlandic animal head brooches, and probably the deceased was a Gotlandic woman, married to a Livonian husband (Zariņa 1992, Abb. 1).

Animal head brooches of true Gotlandic origin, however, are rare outside Gotland. I believe there is one brooch in Staraia Ladoga (Wikinger, Waräger, Normannen 1992: 300), and perhaps one or two more stray brooches in the area.

From Grobina there is an interesting hybrid between a South Scandinavian so called beak fibula (Sw. 'näbbfibula') and the Gotlandic brooches (Thunmark-Nylén 1983: fig. 3). The general shape is that of the beak fibula, but the construction with sloping sides and a developed base-plate is pure Gotlandic and doesn't exist (as far as I know) outside Gotland (with the exception of the Grobina examples).

## **Bead spacers**

Before the Viking Age bead spacers were used in mainland Scandinavia as well as in Gotland. In the Viking Age the mainlanders ceased to use bead spacers, but the Gotland women went on using them and developing them into large and richly ornamented objects, often with silver plating around the animal-ornamented panels. They seem to have been manufactured at least into the middle of the 10th century. There are bead spacers in Latvia. The oldest types are close to the older Gotlandic shapes, but the later Latvian types have developed their own shapes – plain and flat, sometimes curved (Thunmark-Nylén 1992b).

## **Tool brooches**

Also tool brooches were used by mainland Scandinavians before the Viking Age but in the Viking Age those brooches are exclusively Gotlandic. The brooch type is maintained until the bitter end, and you find them also in the very latest graves (the Gotland churchyard graves) (Thunmark-Nylén 1995: Abb. 455:10, 462:7).

This type of brooch exists also in Latvia. It has been found in a number of graves. One of the oldest is in Grobina (Nerman 1958: Taf. 1:4; also Taf. 15:84). Others are known from further west along the Baltic coast (Kulakov 1994: 1 pav.). Later types probably developed locally in Latvia (Zariņa 1992: Abb. 7:1), without obvious connections to Gotland (?).

The Gotland women used those brooches for ribbons or chains to carry a knife-sheath, keys, needle-case and perhaps the ear-scoop and tweezers (Thunmark-Nylén 1995, for instance Abb. 40) – that is why they are called tool brooches. In Latvia it seems that the chains carried bells and amulets (Zariņa 1992: Abb. 7:2). I can only remember one case from Gotland where a bell is suspended from those chains (Thunmark-Nylén 1995: Abb. 45b:26).

## **Bracteates**

What has been said about bead spacers and tool brooches also goes for the bracteates – these were used in the mainland before the Vendel Period and Viking Age, but in the Viking Age they are exclusive to Gotland. In Gotland they developed into the 'E-type' during the Vendel Period, of which there are one or two examples in Latvia. In Latvia later a local development took place, which

doesn't appear in Gotland, the bracteate with the domed central part (Zariņa 1992: Abb. 7:2).

## East Baltic objects in Gotland

I have now mostly dwelt on Gotlandic objects in the East Baltic area. Some words should also be said of the East Baltic objects found in Gotland.

Apart from the above-mentioned male equipment (penannular brooches and belt fittings), which is common to both the Gotland and Baltic areas, there are two prominent groups of female objects in Gotland, which obviously emanate from the East Baltic area, namely dress pins and armlets.



Fig. 6. Dress pins. Gotland, Endre parish, SHM 20105; Alskog parish, SHM 15185; Boge parish, SHM 11374. Photo B. Lundberg.

## Dress pins

We have a certain amount of dress pins of both the cruciform (Estonian and other types) and triangular types (Fig. 6). Dress pins of this kind is strange to the Gotlandic female dress. Local dress operates with dress pins, it is true, but they are comparatively small and insignificant and worn close to the neck on the shoulders in the inner garments (Thunmark-Nylén 1995: Abb. 1:4, 8:1, 23:2–3, 27:2–3, 28:5–6 and many others).

## Armings

The Gotlandic women seem to have loved armlets – rings and 'Armbügel' – especially in the later Viking Age. Apart from the silver bangles, 'Armbügel', which almost never are found in graves, there are common Gotlandic types, especially the flat one with tapering ends and a transversal middle part (Thunmark-Nylén 1995, for instance Abb. 71:7). Quite a number of the armlets in Gotland, however, seem to have been manufactured in the East Baltic area. Those are different from the local Gotlandic types (Fig. 7). In some cases, however, they may be difficult to identify as Gotlandic or East Baltic.



Fig. 7. Armlets. Gotland, Levide parish, SHM 17647; unknown parish on Gotland, SHM 7571:448. Photo M. Stranger.

## Interpretations and conclusions

The headlines of the interpretation are well known. – In the early phase it seems that Scandinavians and Gotlanders settled in the coastal area, and later the contacts were of another kind.

Obviously, Scandinavians and Gotlanders lived side by side with their Curonian hosts and also had contact with their home-land. This can be understood, for instance, from the odd development of the above-mentioned Scandinavian Vendel period 'näbbfibula' with Viking Age Gotlandic construction. A sign of true settlement is the recently discovered Gotlandic picture stone at Grobina (Petrenko 1991).

The local shapes of female adornments (bracteates, bead-spacers and tool brooches) I think would have its roots in the early contacts, from which some exponents were picked up and developed in local ways. A parallel to the Gotlandic shapes are the Scandinavian oval brooches, which were developed in the Livonian area during a long time.

A sign, that points at a certain disintegration, though, is the use of case-combs by the different sexes. Also one could mention a certain chain-plate of Gotlandic 'female' origin, which has been re-made to serve as a male chain-holder (Apala & Apals 1992, fig. 3–4). If the Gotlanders and Latvians had had more integrated contacts in this time, they would probably have had the same 'sex habits'. Also the different use of, for instance, tool brooches points in this direction.

After the settlers had gone back or become fully assimilated, we have signs of individuals 'from the other side' in both Latvia and Gotland – I am thinking of the above-mentioned Gotlandic woman buried in Laukskola. And the East Baltic dress-pins in Gotland I think arrived to Gotland in the dresses of East Baltic women, who had married travelling Gotlanders and gone to a new country as house-wives.

Also, the 'male travelling' would be the cause of the common international fashion of the male dress and weapon equipment – I haven't mentioned the weapons, but also among these there is witness of the internationality of, for instance, the sword chapes and other objects (Kazakevičius 1992, esp. fig. 2).

I regard the East Baltic armlets found in Gotland as gifts or souvenirs brought home to wives or daughters by travelling husbands and fathers.

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## **Keletas pastabų apie Gotlando ir Baltijos jūros rytinių pakrančių ryšius**

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### **Santrauka**

Artimiausioje Gotlandui rytinėje Baltijos jūros pakrantėje gyveno kuršiai. Apie gotlandiečių ir kuršių santykius duomenų yra nuo seniausių laikų, tačiau čia bus kalbama tik apie Vikingų laikotarpio kultūrinius ryšius. Visų pirma tokius duomenis randame nagrinėdami šukas, kurios Gotlande atsirado X a. viduryje ir randamos iš pradžių vyrų, o vėliau tik moterų kapuose. Atrodo, kad kuršės jas naudojo anksčiau nei Gotlando moterys. Pasaginės segės Gotlande pasirodo apie X a. pradžią ir yra tokių pačių tipų, kaip ir Baltijos jūros rytuose (1 pav.). Vėlyvaja-me Vikingų laikotarpyje išsiskiria specifiniai jų bruožai, būdingi tik Gotlandui (2 pav.). Gotlande taip pat žinoma ir importinių segių (3 pav.). Mažiau aptinkama segių, pavaizduotų 4 pav., kurios gerai pažįstamos Lietuvos archeologams. Vienas pasaginių segių tipas – aguoninėmis galvutėmis, būdingas abiem pusėms, tiek Gotlandui, tiek ir Rytų Pabaltijui, todėl greičiausiai jų gamybos centrai ir buvo abipus jūros. Diržai gausiai apkalti metaliniais apkaliukais Gotlande pasirodo tuo

pat metu, kaip ir pasaginės segės. Jų randama ir Rytuose. Tačiau labiau gilinan-  
tis į detales galima atskirti vietinius gaminius nuo importuotų.

Gotlando moterų mėgtų dėželių segių nedaug rasta Rytų Pabaltijyje ir Rytų Prūsijoje. Jos priklauso VIII-IX a. gaminiams. Vienas iš naujausių tokių radinių yra iš Laukskuolos kapinyno, kur kape buvo kartu su dviem Gotlando gyvūninėmis segėmis. Gali būti, jog tai gotlandietės kapas, kuri buvo ištekėjusi už lyvio. Gotlan-  
do kilmės gyvūninės segės labai retos kitur. Žinoma viena iš Staraja Ladogos ir dar viena ar dvi atsitiktinės iš to paties regiono. Gruobinėje aptiktas įdomus pietų Skandinavijos, taip vadinamas "näbbfibula" ir Gotlando segės hibridas.

*Bead spacers* buvo naudojami tiek Skandinavijos žemyninėje dalyje, tiek ir Gotlande dar prieš Vikingų laikotarpį. Vikinginiu laikotarpiu jie pavirsta į didelius ir turtingai ornamentuotus papuošalus, dažnai inkrustuotus sidabru. Šių papuošalų rasta ir Latvijoje. Seniausieji artimi gotlandiškiems, vėliau įgyja vietinių bruožų.

*Tool brooches* buvo naudojamos Skandinavijos žemyninėje dalyje dar iki Vi-  
kingų laikotarpio, tačiau Vikinginiu metu jos išskirtinai gotlandietiškos. Šis segių tipas randamas ir Latvijoje. Vienas iš seniausių yra iš Gruobinės. Jų taip pat aptinkama ir toliau į pietus Baltijos pajūriu. Brakteatai, kaip ir bead spacers bei tool brooches naudoti Vendelio ir Vikingų laikotarpiais, tačiau pastarajame perio-  
de tik Gotlande. Vienas ar du rasti ir Latvijoje.

*Rytų Pabaltijo dirbiniai Gotlande.* Smeigtukai ir apyrankės - dvi moterų pa-  
puošalų grupės kilusios iš Rytų Pabaltijo. Smeigtukai kryžinėmis ir trikampėmis galvutėmis yra svetimi Gotlandui. Saloje naudoti smeigtukai skiriasi išvaizda bei dėvėjimo būdu. Apyrankės gotlandiečių moterų buvo labai mėgiamos, ypač vė-  
lyvajame Vikingų laikotarpyje. Didelė dalis apyrankių, aptiktų Gotlande atrodo pagamintos Rytų Pabaltijyje. Jos skiriasi nuo vietinių (7 pav.). Kai kuriais atvejais jas sunku atskirti.

*Interpretacija ir išvados.* Skandinavai ir gotlandiečiai ankstyvajame Vikingų laikotarpyje apsigyveno Rytų Pabaltijyje, kur gyveno petis petin su kuršiais. Tai patvirtina Gruobinėje aptiktas akmuo su gotlandietišku piešiniu ir vietiniai mote-  
rų papuošalai transformavęsi iš atsivežtinių.

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