

# **Chieftains and Traders looking East - the Late Roman and Early Germanic Period contacts between the Eastern Baltic and the Southern Scandinavian area**

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This paper intends to point out connections between the Western and Eastern Baltic areas on the basis of archaeological material.

Publication language and Mapping.

Not only has the language of publication often erected a barrier hampering our understanding of the results of archaeological research in the East Baltic states, but also (and this is a connected matter) until recent years it has not been common for the mapping of archaeological material to cover the whole Baltic Sea region (Bitner-Wróblewska 1992, 1995). Maps often incorporate either the West Scandinavian area, the German or the Polish coast zone, Samland or the East Baltic territory. You may wonder, if maps where the East Baltic area is totally without symbols, really do indicate, that the objects under analysis do not exist in the area. Another common occurrence is for map legends, very conveniently, are placed in the corner of the map, blocking out an area - just as often happens in Denmark, where Bornholm is forgotten or covered over by the map text.

## **Scandinavia**

In south-western Scandinavia in the Late Roman and Migration periods there is clear evidence of trade connections and maybe other kinds of contact with the Western Roman Provinces, as well as convincing evidence of connections with the Baltic Sea and from thence further on to the Black Sea region.

The highpoint of the Danish island of Zealand (Sjælland) during the third and fourth centuries involves both western and eastern long distance contacts, and much debate about the role of Denmark in Late Roman period is based upon the character of south-east Denmark and its role as middleman between the eastern and western parts of the Baltic Sea region.

## **Baltic and Polish archaeological research**

Archaeological studies of the Baltic countries, including Lithuania and as well Northern, Central and Southern Poland, illustrate, that there were close contacts between east and west - stretching from the Baltic countries and Poland to Denmark (Kokowski 1995). The Danish islands of Bornholm, Zealand and Funen are situated at the western end of the Baltic Sea, whence other waterways lead further on to the North Sea, the Channel, the Rhineland and so forth.

Theories already published concerning these contacts are not of direct importance here, where the presence of colleagues from the Eastern Baltic area provide me with the possibility of carrying the discussion further on about two main questions, that is, to get an idea of how the ties operated during the Late Roman (mid-second to the end of the fourth century A.D.) and Migration periods and more explicitly, between which territories these ties stretched.

Archaeological literature, especially new publications such as the very useful catalog "Die Balten", states, that the culture of the Western Balts was formed, apparently, in close connection with three other cultural centres: Central Europe, Scandinavia and Finland (Kaczynski 1987). However, a row of new publications has appeared, including the publication of the Plinkaigalis burial ground (Kazakevičius 1993), the very fine overview of Samland during the Roman period and the connections with the Roman Empire and Barbaricum (Nowakowski 1996) as well as the work of Okulicz-Kozaryn (1992) concerning the lower Weichel area during the early Roman period.

## **Contacts**

Viewed from the westernmost part of the Baltic Sea, from the South Scandinavian area, there exists today a better understanding of contacts between south-western Scandinavia and the Western Roman Provinces and the Northern Polish area. Also connections can be traced between certain parts of Denmark and south-east European culture - the Cherniachov/Sintana de Mures cultures. Contacts between south Scandinavia and the coastal zone of Germany and Poland are documented convincingly. However, there remains some difficulty in understanding the significance of Late Roman Baltic finds in connection with South Scandinavia.

## **Raw material**

Certain kinds of raw material in the Baltic area was of great interest to other Germanic areas and especially to the Roman Provinces. Therefore, the theory that the Eastern Baltic region not was closely involved in a network of exchange and trade during the Late Roman and Migration periods is not convincing. As early as the first century A.D. the amber trade is mentioned in written sources (Pliny the Elder (23-79)). In *Historia Naturalis* Pliny describes a Roman amber expedition conducted by a Roman knight from Carnuntum; this expedition took place under the reign of the emperor Nero. People living in the East Baltic area are also mentioned by Tacitus (ca.55-120) in his *Germania* as the Aestii, and Claudius Ptolemy (90-168) described the "Galindai" and the "Soudinoi". After the second century A.D. no classical sources describe this area for quite a long time.

## **Influence from abroad and the amber trade**

The mapping of Roman imports by Eggers in 1951 and also his interpretation makes it clear, that east of the river Passarge, that is, in East Prussia, Lithuania and Latvia (south of the river Düna) - imports of Roman provincial fibulae are rather frequent, but most other import groups are missing (Eggers 1951). Eggers' hypothesis was that this map described a border-line between Baltic people and Finno-Ugrian people, just as he suggested, that the distribution of the Roman bronze vessels illustrated a border between the Balts and the Germanic people (Eggers 1951 Karte 4). Today, it seems difficult to reconcile ethnic, linguistic and archaeological conceptions with such mappings as these.

During the first and second centuries A.D., the influence of Przeworsk culture on the Western Balts was apparently very strong. Przeworsk culture again came early under the influence of the Roman Empire and in fact it got status as middle-man operating with the coastal zone of the Baltic Sea. The Przeworsk culture apparently administrated the amber trade routes, which brought amber from Samland, Masuria and Western Lithuania to the Roman Danubian Provinces.

Thanks to this route, Roman imports reached the Eastern Baltic region early, especially Roman coins (mostly bronze coins - sestertii) and Norisch-Pannonian and other Roman fibulae types. Nevertheless, Roman bronze vessels and glass are surprisingly rare. The pattern of Roman import in this area is interesting, because the Western Balts apparently got so few Roman vessels. This is in contrast to the neighbouring Przeworsk- and Wielbark cultures. The same is to be said about Terra Sigillata. Roman coins are mostly found in Baltic graves dated from the end of the second to the middle of the third century A.D. The latest distribution maps illustrate the same eastern limit for Terra Sigillata north of the Carpathians (Bursche 1992b). By contrast many Roman glass beads are known, but not yet fully handled (TRADED?). Among the imported Roman jewellery of bronze and silver the enamel decorated fibulae should to be mentioned. Roman weapons are extremely rare, unlike in certain other parts of Barbaricum including Scandinavia.

## **Wielbark culture barrier**

Towards the end of the second century A.D., the Eastern Baltic countries were isolated from the Przeworsk culture because of the Wielbark culture, and thereafter communication with the Roman Empire changed. Roman imports originating from Gaul and the Roman Germanic provinces show that a more western continental relationship over both land and sea now existed. Contacts with both Scandinavia and the Rhineland were of importance. From the fourth century A.D. onwards the waterways connecting the Baltic Sea with the Black Sea region gained great importance - also for Scandinavia.

## **Discussion**

The problems raised here are clearly set forth by Michelbertas (Michelbertas 1992:282): "Wir können die Schlussfolgerung ziehen, dass die Kontakte der Bevölkerung Litauens mit den römischen Provinzen an der Mitteldonau, die am Anfang des ersten Jahrhunderts n. Chr. angeknüpft worden waren, ihre Blütezeit

in der zweiten Hälfte des 1. Jhs. erlebt haben. Als der "Bernsteinweg" im 3. Jh. an Bedeutung verlor, erstarkten die Kontakte der Westbalten mit den Rheinprovinzen auf dem Seeweg. Eben aus dieser Provinzen gelangten nach Litauen emailverzierte Schmucksachen, grosse Mengen von Glasperlen, wohl auch ein Teil der römischen Münzen. Als "Renaissance" der Beziehungen zwischen dem Mitteldonauegebiet und den Gebieten der Westbalten gilt die jüngere Kaiserzeit (Stufen C3 und D), auch die frühe Völkerwanderungszeit."

In recent archaeological literature we find several statements about contacts between the Western Baltic area and Scandinavia/Rhineland during the Late Roman period. Bearing in mind, that the almost total absence of Roman bronze and glass vessel types, which are so common in Denmark, from the Western Balt find -complexes, is very strange - despite the Wielbark culture explanation - this makes archaeologists wonder what the nature of the above described contacts actually was.

Bursche has an essential point in his paper from 1992 published in "Barbaricum '92", where he says, that at the present stage of research, it seems, that the Ae coinage flowing into the Western Balt circle territories mostly passed through the Rhine Limes, and that the latest part may have come directly from Italy (Bursche 1992a). The inflow of these coins could be caused by an urgent need to change direction of exchange as a result of the political events and migrations, which took place in the third quarter of the second century - the traditional links between the Empire and European Barbaricum must have been badly disturbed. The Marcomannic wars must have disturbed the regular exchange along the amber route (Lund Hansen 1991), as also other scholars have suggested.

Connections along a much longer route must have been established for the transport of easily transportable goods (e.g. coinage) and for assuring the delivery of amber. As pointed out by some scholars, there are astonishing amounts of amber in the Rhineland from the mid-second century (where the amber manufacture in Aquileia (northern Italy) more or less ceased) (Lund Hansen 1987:235 ff.; 1991:177 ff.). Bursche's point is, that this could be the result of a direct trade connection, because these very emissions are lacking in Denmark and on the Baltic Islands. This trade through the Baltic Sea ended very soon because of the increasing troubles during the third century with the heavy attacks on the Rhineland. First within the period of emperor Constantine coins reached the Western Balts again in modest amounts, but they did so now from another and more eastern route.

This change in connections in the late Roman period fits well with the postulate of a route from the Cherniachov/Sintana de Mures culture passing the Wielbark culture and the Westbalt area up to the Danish islands during the fourth and fifth century. The problem can be portrayed in this way: were there really connections between the Western Balts and South Scandinavia and again from South Scandinavia to the Rhineland, or was there also a direct route from the Western Balts to the Rhineland in the third and fourth century, and what kind of archaeological material do we need in order to progress with this discussion?

Objects known from Denmark/Scandinavia and the Baltic area, which underline this statement about interregional contacts are: breloque formed amber beads (Tempelmann-Maczyńska 1985:81 ff.; Lund Hansen 1987:235 ff.; Lund Hansen 1991:177 ff.; Lund Hansen 1995:217 ff.), pendants such as, for example, basket formed pendants (Lund Hansen 1995:222 ff.), and from Easternmost Zealand in

Mariekb Mark even only fingering of East Baltic type Beckmann 1969 type 29 (Beckmann 1969:42; Lund Hansen 1995:230). We should add to these: gold or silver torques with pearshaped closing (Roggenbuck 1988; Andersson 1995:90 ff.; Carnap-Bornheim 1996 a:162 ff.; Carnap-Bornheim 1996b:351 ff.), knob-shaped armlets (Andersson 1995:66 ff.; Lund Hansen 1995:203 ff.; Carnap-Bornheim 1996a:262 ff., Carnap-Bornheim 1996b:349 ff., 479 f.), Late Roman drinking horns with ornamented mountings (Andrzejowski 1991:7 ff.) and horse equipment (Wilbert-Rost 1994).

At the same time, some objects are spread in a region from Denmark to the Black Sea without leaving any trace in Lithuania, i.e certain types of iron and bone combs (Lund Hansen 1995:413 ff.), "Ringknaufschwerter" (Lund Hansen 1995:386 ff.), runic inscriptions (Lund Hansen 1995:414; Stoklund 1995:317 f.), certain fibulae types as the rosette fibulae (Lund Hansen 1995:212 ff.), the swastika fibulae (Lund Hansen 1995:214 ff.) and glass originating from the Black Sea region (Lund Hansen 1995:392 f., 413 f.). It is difficult to present a clear conclusion on this basis partly because of a diverse distribution pattern and partly because of chronological problems. The chronological problems develop because many objects or types are dated later in the East Baltic area than in the South Scandinavian area, as for example, the afore-mentioned drinking horns. Recent discussions with colleagues have led to the important conclusion, that some types, which in the north European area are dated to the Late Roman period, in the East Baltic region exist far into the Migration period.

The following examples stress or in fact sum up most of the already mentioned problems: as in the last century excavations have been made at the Danish weapon offering bog at Nydam, as there have been recently too in the Ejsbøl bog and the Illerup bog (Ilkjær 1994, 1996). In Nydam last summer we found a "Lion"-figure - totally un-Scandinavian - stratigraphically located at the transition from the fourth to the fifth century A.D. (Rieck 1996). It must be compared with the figures in the Martinovka-hoard in the Ukraine, south of Kiev, but such examples are also known from Langobardic central-European material.

A consequence of more and more objects being mapped these years is, that we gain a still more complicated and complex picture of the distribution of a row of antiquities with wide distribution..., which complicate the answers to the archaeological material about what kind of contacts there actually were between certain regions, the background to these relationships, the leap in some distribution patterns and the clear deviation within certain datings.

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## **Vadai ir pirkliai žiūrint į rytus – Senojo geležies amžiaus pabaigos ir didžiojo tautų kraustymosi laikotarpio pradžios ryšiai tarp Rytų Pabaltijo ir pietų Skandinavijos**

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### **Santrauka**

Ne tik publikacijų kalba dažnai pastato barjerą tarp Rytų Pabaltijo archeologinių tyrinėjimų supratimo, bet iš dalies ir tai, jog trūksta archeologinės medžiagos kartografavimo. Žemėlapiai apima arba vakarų Skandinaviją ir Vokietijos pajūrį, arba Lenkijos, Sambijos ir Rytų Pabaltijo teritorijas. Kai Rytinės Baltijos jūros pakrantės vaizduojamos be simbolių, tai atrodo, kad medžiagos jose apskritai nėra. Tas pat yra ir su Danijos teritorijos kartografavimu, kai simboliai išdėstomi žemėlapiu pakraštyje, taip dingsta, pavyzdžiui, Bornholmas.

Akivaizdūs duomenys apie prekybinius ir galbūt kitokius ryšius tarp pietvakarinės Skandinavijos ir Vakarų Romos imperijos provincijų Senojo geležies amžiaus pabaigoje – didžiojo tautų kraustymosi pradžioje, taip pat su Rytų Pabaltiju ir iš čia toliau iki Juodosios jūros. Pastebimi ir ryšiai nusidriekę tarp Danijos ir pietryčių Europoje buvusios Černiachovo-Sintana de Mures kultūros.

Archeologiniai tyrinėjimai Baltijos valstybėse rodo, kad buvo glaudūs kontaktai tarp rytų ir vakarų – tarp Baltijos valstybių ir Lenkijos iš vienos pusės ir Danijos iš kitos. Naujos publikacijos parodė, kad vakarų baltų kultūra vystėsi glaudžiam kontaktė su kitais Baltijos jūros regionais, kaip antai: Centrine Europa, Skandinavija ir Suomija.

Baltijos regiono medžiaga yra svarbi kitiems germanų pasaulio regionams, ypač Romos imperijos provincijoms. Tačiau teorija, kad Rytų Pabaltijys nebuvo nepertraukiamai įtrauktas į prekybos tinklą, yra nepatikima. Jau I a. po Kr. rašytiniai šaltiniai mini tokius ryšius buvus.

Vis daugiau ir daugiau dirbinių pastaraisiais metais kartografuojant susidaro painus paveikslas, kuris komplikuoja atsakymą apie ryšių tarp įvairių regionų kilmę ir kokiais ryšiais jie buvo susieti.

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