

TRADE, SALT AND AMBER. THE FORMATION OF LATE MIGRATION PERIOD ELITES IN THE 'BALTI-CULTI' AREA OF NORTHERN POLAND (THE ELBLĄG GROUP)

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Abstract

This paper presents the Elbląg group at its peak, that is, the late sixth and early seventh centuries. Imports are presented, namely Scandinavian (but also Merovingian) denominators of opulence (drinking horns, particular imported goods, seaxes in ornamental scabbards, and so on), and also the possible grounds on which local settlers thrived (the amber trade, maybe also the salt trade). The geostrategic position of the Elbląg group is analysed, as well as sea trade routes and boats used on the Baltic Sea during the Late Migration Period. Contacts between southern Scandinavia and the Elbląg group are described against the wider cultural and political background.

Key words: elites, the Elbląg group, Migration Period, Scandinavia, Merovingian circle.

Introduction

The Elbląg group covered quite a small area; nevertheless, it seems to be one of the most important cultural units attributed to the West Balt cultural circle, drawing the attention of numerous scholars. To a large degree, this results from its specific location. It was situated in the northern part of Poland, and its archaeological sites are along the edge of the Elbląg Upland, between the mouth of the River Pasłęka and the southern edge of the Drużno Bay, reconstructed in the form it may have existed in in late Antiquity (Plate III). It owes its name to Jerzy Okulicz (1973, p.471ff; 1989, p.89ff), and the name has been generally accepted by scholars. There are opinions that this group was part of a cultural unit from the Sambian-Natangian area, called Dollkeim-Kovrovo culture by Wojciech Nowakowski (Nowakowski 1996, p.96ff; Bitner-Wróblewska 2001, pp.21-25, 132). Some researchers indicate its mixed, Baltic-German-Scandinavian character, lacking independent traits (Bitner-Wróblewska 2008, p.109). The Elbląg group formed several dozen years after the population of Wielbark culture left its cemeteries on the east side of the Vistula delta. This happened, it seems, in the final stage of Phase D and the beginning of Phase E (the late fifth and early sixth centuries), as a result of a so far not completely explained process of symbiosis of interregional and Sambian elements (that is, horse graves, forms of pottery, personal ornaments, and also weapons). The Elbląg group formed as the eastern edges of the Vistula delta were taken over by the newly formed, mixed social group, or, as we assume, by the

Vidivarii, known from the writings of Jordanes.¹ We could interpret it as a 'multi-culti' area, but, according to archaeological material, it was determined by Balt elements, so that we might humorously call it 'Balti-culti'.

So far, unfortunately, the area has not been studied in detail (Kowalski 2000; Kontny *et al.* 2011, p.7ff). This is partly because pre-war archaeologists intended to

¹ See the opinions of certain scholars (Kunkel 1942, pp.1812-1813; Okulicz-Kozaryn 1992, p.140) in trying to associate the new settlement in the Elbląg Upland with the early sixth-century information from Jordanes, *Getica* V, 36: '*Ad litus autem Oceani, ubi tribus faucibus fluenta Vistulae fluminis ebibuntur, Vidivarii resident ex diversis nationibus agregati ...*' and elsewhere in *Getica* XVII, 96: '*... nunc [the early sixth century] ut fertur insulam eam [Gepedoiis, probably the Elbląg Upland?] gens Vidivarii incolit qui Vidivarii ex diversis nationibus ac si in unum asylum colecti sunt et gentem fecisse nescuntur.*' The unusual way of formation through the allochthonic process of a new tribal group, probably with the use of Aestian settlers moving from the Sambian Peninsula, mixing with members of Germanic military retinues and sailors from Bornholm and other Baltic islands migrating from various parts of the world, is convincingly supported by archaeological sources. For besides the early 'almost Balt' cemeteries from Phases E₁-E_{2a} (Młoteczno, Braniewo com., site 3; Garbina, Braniewo com.; Podgórze, Braniewo com.; Pasłek, Pasłek com.; Chojnowo, Tolkmicko commune), there is one of the four largest concentrations of finds in northern Europe of Byzantine solidus issued in 455-518 AD, and hoards of silver and gold ornaments from the second half of the fifth century and the early sixth century (Godłowski 1981, p.104ff; Bursche 1998, p.225; Ciołek 2001). Together with the cemeteries, they formed contemporaneous concentrations of settlement points.

find the Medieval trading port of Truso, and were interested not so much in the so-called Old Prussian culture (Panfil 2011, *passim*). Moreover, the documentation of excavations, together with a large part of the artefacts, were lost during the Second World War (Panfil 2011, p.100ff). Therefore, we have to reconstruct an image of the culture based mainly on two cemeteries: at Łęcze, in the Tolkmicko commune (formerly Silberberg bei Lentzen), published in the late 19th century (Dorr 1898), and one at Nowinka, also in the Tolkmicko commune, published recently (Kontny *et al.* 2011).

Burial rite

The exclusive form of human burial rite was cremation. Frequently, people of both sexes were buried here, together with their inhumed horses. As for the construction of the graves, firstly big pits were dug, and then animals, probably still alive, were forced into them. Usually they were deposited in a ventro-dorsal position, which was natural for a lying horse; but sometimes different positions are observed, indicating that the horses were trying to get out of the grave pit. The animals may have been ridden into the ground, so that it was easy to push them into the pit, but it is also possible that they were stunned, poisoned or intoxicated. After filling the horse's pit, charred human bones with grave furnishing (not burnt) were laid in it, sometimes also with a stone pavement on the top (Kontny *et al.* 2011, pp.116-121). We are probably dealing with the relation of a rider (the horse's owner) and its stallion (generally males were deposited). Animals were found wearing bridles, and frequently with headgear with bronze ornamental elements mounted on straps (Kontny *et al.* 2009).

Imported goods

In the graves, we find a lot of items of local origin, like disc brooches, ladder or pseudo-ladder fibulas (*Schlusskreuzfibeln*), local brooches, simple in form, and belt elements, such as openwork belt fittings (*Kreuzdornschnalle*) and kidney-shaped buckles (Kowalski 2000, pp.211-213, 219-221). On the other hand, there were also a lot of imports, namely of south Scandinavian origin (Fig.1. 1-7). We may list the disc brooches. Instead of local forms, made of thin bronze leaf, one made of a solid bronze disc cast together with a catchplate and a pair of plates for fastening the axle is proven: Nowinka, Tolkmicko loose find (Kontny *et al.* 2011, p.56, Pl. CIV.6). This is surely of Scandinavian origin, Type Ørsnes I1-2 (1966)/Høilund Nielsen I1b/c (1987). Other Scandinavian forms were S-shaped brooches Type Høilund Nielsen L1, Variant Rundkvist

L1a (2003), pair of which was found at Nowinka cemetery in grave 41 (Kontny *et al.* 2011, p.25, Pl. XX-VII.1-2). The most popular imports so far were beak fibulas Type Høilund Nielsen G1 (Kontny 2010), found in grave 38 at Nowinka (Kontny *et al.* 2011, p.24, Pl. XXVI.1), but also during rescue excavations at Janów Pomorski (Truso), Elbląg commune (Jagodziński 2010, Fig. 108), and two more in the cemetery at Komorowo Żuławskie, Elbląg commune (the latter are later, and they could be determined as type G3).² A very late form comes from a 'Viking' assemblage from grave 41 at Elbląg-Pole Nowomiejskie, site 37 (Neugebauer 1938, Fig. 6.f; 1975, Fig. 3; Jagodziński 1997, p.69, Pl. XIV.9). Equal-armed brooches represent almost the same level of frequency. We may enumerate loose find Type F1c after K. Høilund Nielsen (1987), or F2 after M. Ørsnes (1966) from Nowinka necropolis (Kontny *et al.* 2009, p.56, Pl. CIV.7). A similar equal-armed item was discovered at Elbląg, Moniuszki St cemetery in feature 265 (Ehrlich 1937, p.275, Fig. 8; Petersen 1939, Fig. 183; Neugebauer 1975, Pl. X.2), but it cannot be classified properly due to the imperfect photograph of the artefact and its poor state of preservation. Besides, at the same cemetery, one more equal-armed brooch was found, Type Høilund Nielsen F2/Ørsnes F4 (Jagodziński 1997, Pl. VII.3; Museum of Elbląg inv. no 50/144). Finally, we should mention the button-on-bow brooches (*Rückenknopffibel*), one of which was found in feature 2 from Elbląg, Moniuszki St (Ehrlich 1937, pp.274-275, Figs. 7-8; Petersen 1939, Fig. 183; Neugebauer 1975, Pl. XI, upper right). It represents Type Høilund Nielsen E2A2b (1987, p.76). A possible fragment of the second, definitely later,³ reused as a hanger, comes from Janów Pomorski (Jagodziński 2010, Figs. 116, 117), although its identification does not seem absolutely sure.

Besides overwhelming Scandinavian imports, Western elements were also recognised. One of them is a stray find of a fragment of a fibula from Komorowo Żuławskie (Bogucki 2009, pp.32-33).⁴ It is a silver brooch with gold foil with angle-shaped grooved ornamentation (*Fibeln mit winkligem Kerbschnittdekor*) Type V.2.2.6 after A. Koch (1998, p.310ff). It probably originates from east Frankish workshops in the River Rhine basin (Koch 1998, pp.313, 315).

Apart from brooches, several imports should also be traced among the belt elements. The most spectacular comes from Nowinka, grave 84 (Kontny *et al.*

² Personal communication: Mateusz Bogucki PhD (Institute of Archaeology and Ethnology, Polish Academy of Sciences), to whom I would like to express my gratitude.

³ Based on its decoration (see Ørsnes 1966, pp.294, 311).

⁴ I would like to thank Mateusz Bogucki PhD for helping me find the picture of the brooch.

II

RESOURCES
OF THE
COMMUNITIES
OF THE
BALTIC
REGION

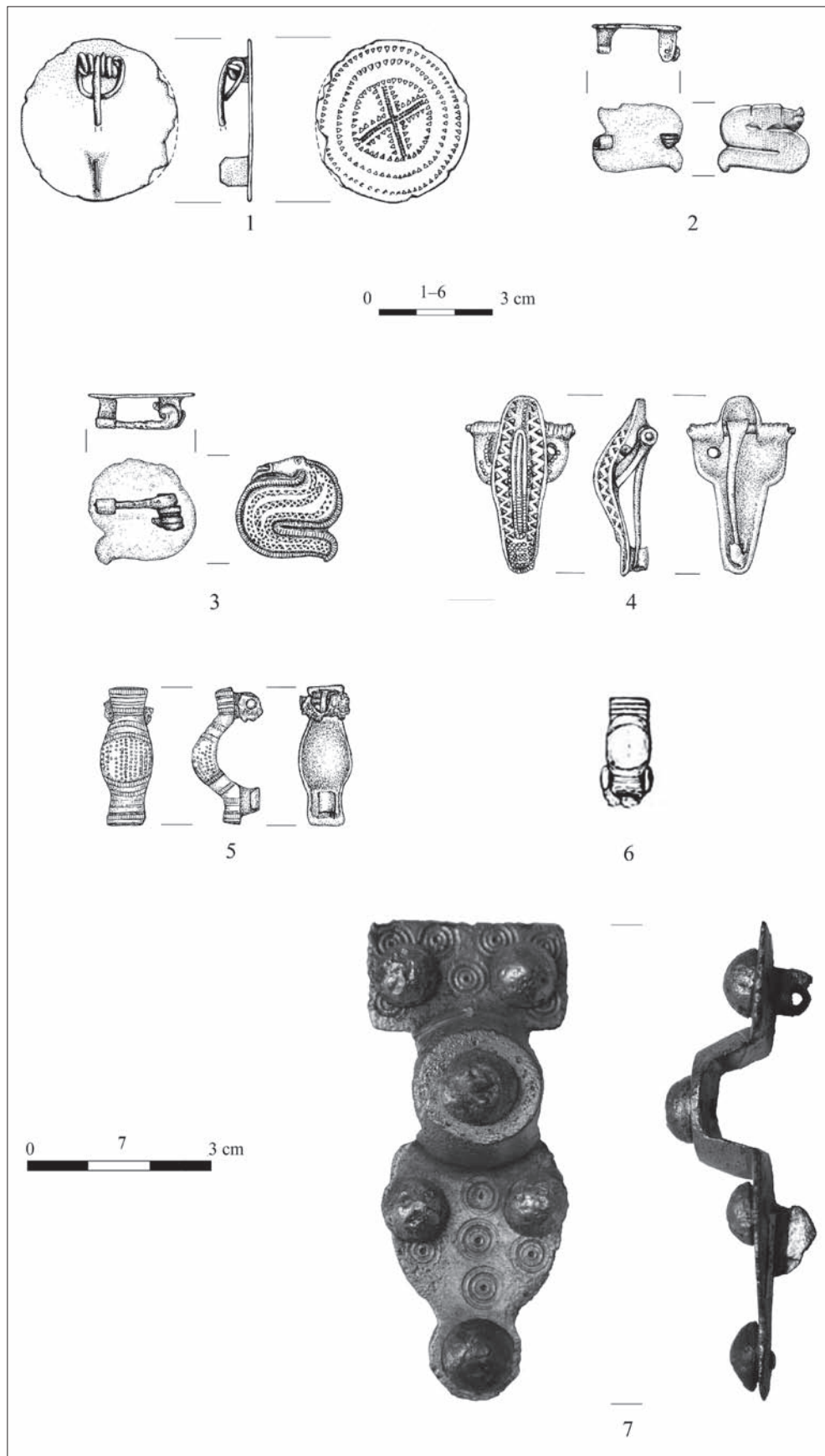


Fig. 1. Scandinavian brooches from the Elbląg group: 1 Nowinka stray find; 2-3 Nowinka, grave 41; 4 Nowinka, grave 38; 5 Nowinka, stray find; 6 Elbląg, Moniuszki St, feature 265; 7 Elbląg, Moniuszki St, feature 2 (1-5 after Kontny *et al.* 2011; 6 after Neugebauer 1975; 7 photograph by B. Kontny, courtesy of the Archaeological Museum in Gdańsk).

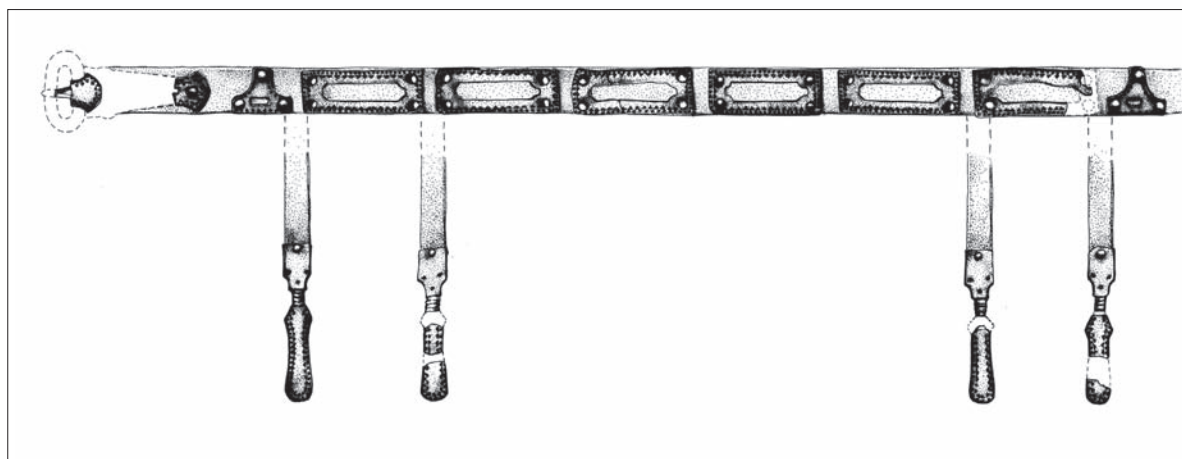


Fig. 2. The imported belt of Merovingian origin from grave 84 at Nowinka (drawn by Joanna Glinkowska-Kowalewska).

2011, pp.37-38, Pl. LVI.3-7). I have in mind the belt set, consisting of tongue-shaped strap ends, rectangular openwork belt plates, T-shaped belt fittings, and a shield-on-tongue buckle (Fig.2). It comes from the Merovingian (probably Frankish) area (Kontny, Pietrzak forthcoming). A similar buckle (Fig. 3), but silver-gilt, not simply bronze, is known from Elbląg, Moniuszki St, feature 239 (Ehrlich 1937, p.275, Fig. 8; Neugebauer 1975, Pl. X.6).⁵ We also know a ferrule of a buckle, probably Type shield-on-tongue from Komorowo Żuławskie,⁶ and a fragment of a ferrule, probably of a buckle of an analogous type from the collection of the Museum of Elbląg, inv. no. 254/700.⁷ In the above cases, we cannot state definitely where it came from: both Scandinavian (Ørsnes 1966, pp.288-289, Figs. 3, 10, 14, 17, 19; Høilund Nielsen 1987, p.75; Nørgård Jørgensen 1999, p.114ff, Fig. 101.2-3) and West European (Koch 1977, Fig. 8.B; Müssemeier *et al.* 2003, Fig. 7; Legoux, Périn, Vallet 2006, p.62; Schmidt 1961, p.140, Fig. 5.A, Pl. 45.s) directions are probable. Moreover, we cannot exclude the Olsztyn group or the Sambian-Natangian influences (Åberg 1919, p.111ff; Kowalski 1991, Fig. 2), though rather not in the case of the silver-gilt item.

⁵ In this group of artefacts, a buckle from Żuławka Szumowska was mentioned (Godłowski 1981, p.114, Fig. 31; Jagodziński 1997, Pl.III.6; Bogucki 2006, p.101, Fig. 10). The inaccurate drawing included in the above-mentioned papers could have supported this idea. Actually, the item is preserved in the collection of the Archaeological Museum in Gdańsk, inv. no. 1986:59, and thus it has to be underlined that it unequivocally originates from Elbląg, Moniuszki St, feature 239.

⁶ Personal communication: Mateusz Bogucki PhD, whom I would like to thank for the information.

⁷ It was found in an undetermined site in the Elbląg area. For the opportunity to work with this material, I would like to thank Maria Kasprzycka PhD, the director of the Elbląg Museum, as well as Grzegorz Stasielowicz MA from the museum.

Additionally to the finds from Nowinka, grave 84, a T-shaped belt fitting with a rectangular perforation in the centre was found in grave 35 at Nowinka (Kontny *et al.* 2011, pp.23-24, Pl. XXIV.2): it was more robust, and adorned in a different, more complicated way, with analogies in Scandinavia (Kontny, Pietrzak, forthcoming); the second item of that kind is the stray find from Jelonki, Rychliki commune (Rudnicki, Trzeciński 1994, p.151, Pl. III.2), with an elongated central arm, typical of the Merovingian area. T-shaped fittings are quite numerous in the Olsztyn group; however, usually without an openwork pattern (Kowalski 1991, Fig. 2; 2000, pp.215-216). Occasionally, they are found in the Sambian-Natangian area, such as the Schosseynoye, Guryevsk district (formerly Warten), stray find.⁸ Nevertheless, the relatively numerous T-shaped fittings found in Scandinavia, determined as Type TR1 (Nørgård Jørgensen 1999, p.114)/C10 (Ørsnes 1966, p.292, Fig. 27)/C5 (Høilund Nielsen 1987, p.76) and much more popular ones from the Merovingian circle (Åberg 1919, p.114, Figs. 154-166; Kontny, Pietrzak, forthcoming 2012) point to two most plausible areas of influence reaching the Elbląg group.

Also, tongue-shaped belt fittings are more frequent in the Elbląg group. From its area, additionally to the items from Nowinka, we can mention also the stray find from Chojnowo, Tolkmicko commune, formerly Conradswalde (Neugebauer 1934, Pl.LXX.3e; Neugebauer 1975, Pl.XI, upper left), and a silver-gilt item from feature 239 at the Elbląg cemetery, Moniuszki St, Elbląg commune, formerly Elbing-Scharnhorststrasse (Ehrlich 1937, p.275, Fig. 8; Neugebauer 1975, Pl. X.5). The former has a slightly different shape to the classic tongue-shaped strap ends; however, it has anal-

⁸ A silver-gilt item, an import (personal communication: Konstantin Skvortsov from the Kaliningrad Regional Arts and History Museum, to whom I am very grateful for this information).

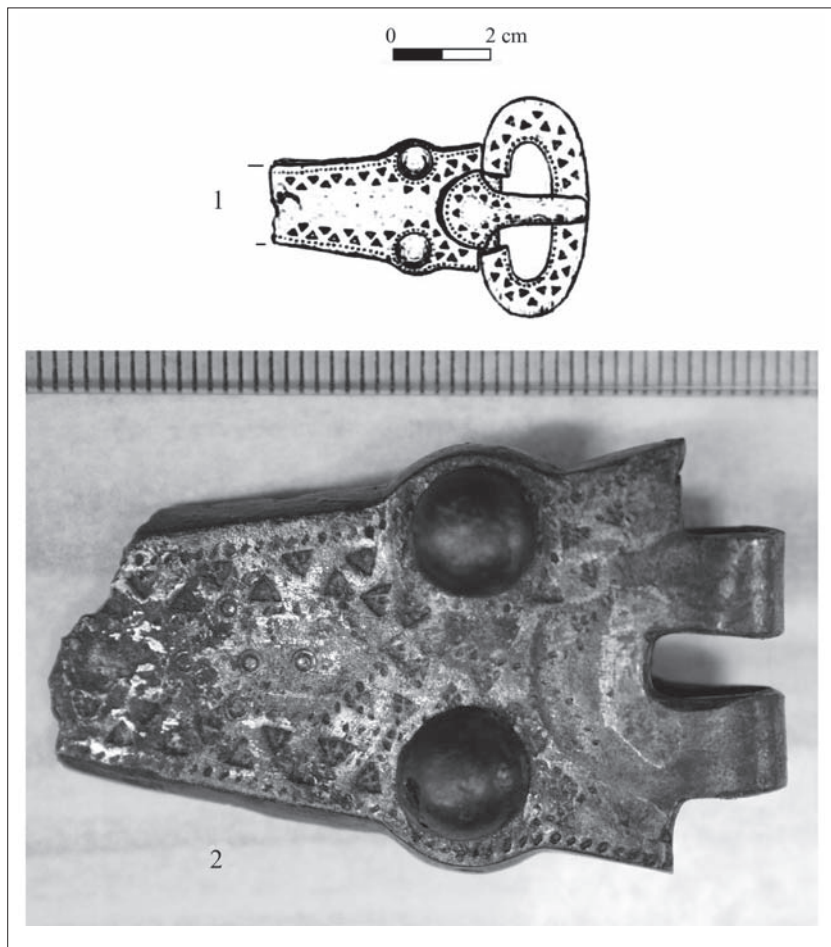


Fig. 3. The shield-on-tongue buckle from Elbląg, Moniuszki St, feature 239 (1 after Neugebauer 1975; 2 a detail of the decoration (photograph by B. Kontny, courtesy of the Archaeological Museum in Gdańsk).

ologies in Scandinavia.⁹ Such forms are also recorded, but sporadically, in the Olsztyn group: two items from grave 10 in Waplewo, Jedwabno commune, formerly Waplitz (Åberg 1919, p.99, Fig. 135; Voigtmann files; Jakobson files), a find from the settlement in Olsztyn-Brzeziny, site XXVIII,¹⁰ and perhaps also the fragmentarily preserved item from grave 219 at Kosewo II, Mrągowo commune, formerly Kossewen (Jakobson files). In my opinion, both are probably Merovingian and Scandinavian connections, although only rarely is it possible to distinguish between those areas.

Other elements seem to present widespread trends in the Baltic region. Openwork T-shape, L-shape and cross-shape patterns on belt plates, ferrules of belt buckles, elements of horse harnesses or sword scabbard suspension plates are present in the Elbląg group: Elbląg-Żyto (Ehrlich 1920, p.193, Fig. 2.e; 1932, p.415, Figs. 6.1, 9.e), Łęcze, grave 13 (Dorr 1898, pp.10, 22, Pl. III.22–23) and grave 28 (Dorr 1898,

pp.12, 21, Pl. II.1), Nowinka, grave 17 (Kontny *et al.* 2011, p.16, Pl. IX.2-3), grave 85 (Kontny *et al.* 2011, p.39, Pl. LX.10) and loose find (Kontny *et al.* 2011, p.57, Pl. CIV.11). They were spotted most frequently in Scandinavia, but also appeared in the Merovingian circle, the Anglo Saxon area, and the West Balt circle, that is, the Olsztyn group, the Sambian-Natangian area and the West Lithuanian group (Kontny *et al.* 2011, p.78ff). These observations show that the idea to decorate plates with an openwork pattern covered a wide area, and items ornamented that way were probably locally made (we cannot state without a detailed study where the idea originated from; so far, it seems that southern Scandinavia was the main point, but we should leave the question without a definite answer).

Some of the artefacts seem to be secondary remade, such as the Scandinavian disc fibula added with thin foil adornment from Łęcze, grave 76, typical of the Balt area (Fig.4).¹¹ It is stored in the Museum of Elbląg collection, inv. no. 107/276, and has been ascribed to the cemetery at Elbląg-Żyto (Natuniewicz 2000, pp.124, 156, Pl. X.10), based on its similarity to the item published by Bruno Ehrlich (Ehrlich 1932, Fig.

⁹ For example, on Bornholm: Østerlars, grave 1 (unpublished, Bornholm Museum inv. no. 1409x108) and Vasegård, stray find (unpublished, National Museum in Copenhagen, inv. no. C35092, Bornholm Museum, inv. no. 2147x37).

¹⁰ Excavations carried out by Adam H. and H. Mackiewicz. Personal communication: Mirosław Rudnicki PhD, from the Institute of Archaeology, University of Warsaw.

¹¹ The brooch from grave 76 is presented in Fig. 5, erroneously labelled as Fig. 6 (Dorr 1898, p.20).

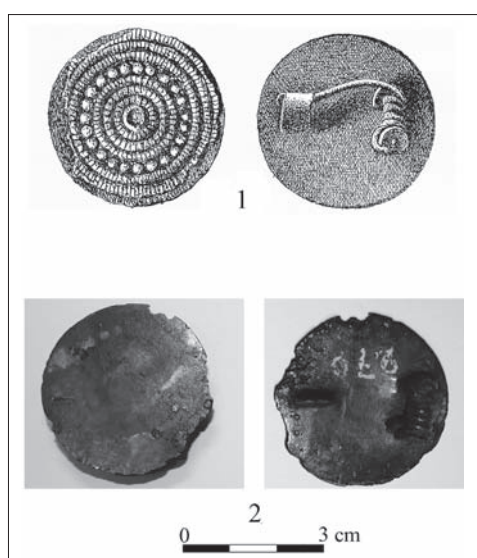


Fig. 4. The disc brooch from Łęczce, grave 76, and its possible identification (1 after Dorr 1898; 2 photograph by B. Kontny, courtesy of the Museum of Elbląg).

7.b).¹² In my opinion, it is more probable to identify it as a brooch from Łęczce, grave 76, which is indicated by its dimensions, traces of soldering the plate to the embossed pearl-like ornament, and the construction detail: the hook-shape end of the spring. This item differs from the typical disc brooches of the Elbląg group in many details which are characteristic of Scandinavia: the disc is thicker, there is no central boss, the catchplate and the projections fixing the axle to the disc are cast. Therefore, it seems to be Scandinavian in origin. Nevertheless, the pearl-like foil ornament soldered to the disc¹³ is definitely not typical of the Scandinavian area. This was generally of Balt tradition, where a pearl-like pattern was used to adorn circular elements of brooches, belts or headgear.¹⁴ So it seems that in the

¹² Personal communication: Rafał Panfil MA.

¹³ Contrary to what Magdalena Natuniewicz supposed (2000, p.124), it seems that brooches of this kind were not decorated with appliqué patterns of incised wire, but only with pearl-like embossed plates.

¹⁴ A plate decorated with a very similar embossed pattern was found in the Natangian cemetery at Kholmogor'e, Pravdisk district, formerly Kipitten (Heym 1938, Pl.35; von zu Mühlen 1975, Pl.22; Kulakov 1990, Pl.VIII.7). Vladimir I. Kulakov assumed that it was a disc brooch (1990, p.63). A similar brooch, but made of iron, is known from the Sambian cemetery at Mitino, grave 266 and grave 358 (Skvortsov 2010, Fig. 19.1, 2, Pl.CCCXCIX.1, DCXV.1). In the west Lithuanian cemetery of Lazdininkiai (Kalnalaukis), in the Kretinga district, grave 73, such discs were used as decorative belt fittings, and the embossed plate was made of silver, and in its centre there was a glass inlay (Bliujienė, Butkus 2002, Fig. 3.3). A very similar pattern was also found on a silver plate decorating a bronze disc brooch from the Olsztyn group cemetery at Tumiany, Barczewo com., grave 95 (Jakobson 2009, p.53, Pl.59.95a). An embossed, but only slightly similar pattern was found on a disc brooch from the Sambian cemetery at

case of the item from Łęczce, grave 76 (maybe also the one from Elbląg-Żytno), we are dealing with Scandinavian brooches supplemented by locally made leaf decorations.

Some artefacts from the Elbląg group give the impression that they are only imitations of foreign origin, like the small pliers fibula (*Zangenfibel*) from Pasłęk. This was inspired by Thuringian items, but is surely not an import. Thuringian brooches had different feet: trapezoid or oval (Koch 1998, p.399ff; Wieczorek 1996, Fig. 289), not rectangular with projections like the case of the Pasłęk fibula. Also, the head had a slightly different shape. Moreover, it has no ornament typical of pliers brooches.

It is also possible that we are dealing with an imitation in the case of an openwork, bronze, circular plate from Pasłęk, a stray find (Fig. 5), described as a fitting or fibula without a preserved fastening mechanism (Ehrlich 1923, p.199, Fig. IX.i). It has the shape of a spoke wheel, so it could be a belt pendant. Such pendants were used in Merovingian circles (by the Franks, Alamans, Bavarians) by females. They hung on belts, and served as amulets and simultaneously connectors to which other amulets were fixed (Lindenschmidt 1880–1889, Pl. 7; Boulanger 1902–1905, Pl. 47.1, 3, 9, 10; Ament 1996, Fig. 26; Vallet 1996, p.688, Fig. 561; Zeller 1996, p.675). They appeared from around 550 AD, and lasted until the end of the seventh century (Koch 1977, Fig. 8.A; Vallet 1996, p.688; Ząbojnik 2010). Similar circular pendants are also known from the Avaric milieu, rarely were they proven for Lombards. Generally, it is thought that they stem from the Merovingian area. Another concept, linking them with Saltovo-Majaki culture (Garam 1980, p.178), is viewed as less probable (Ząbojnik 2010, p.503). On one hand, it could be a simplified (the openwork pattern is generally not so complex as in the case of the majority of Merovingian originals) imitation of the Merovingian form; but on the other hand, we should mention similar (but rather smaller) ornaments in the Balt cultural area, serving, for example, as elements of pins (Vaska 2004, Fig. 1.1, 4). The character of the Pasłęk item cannot be determined ultimately without an autopsy of it; unfortunately, the item was lost.¹⁵

Vetrovo, Zelenogradsk district (formerly Ekriten), grave 3 (Hollack 1914, p.284, Fig. 126). Pearl-like patterns were also proven for headgear connectors from Nowinka, grave 118 (Kontny *et al.* 2011, p.47, Pl.LXXVIII.3).

¹⁵ We should also remember the finds from the earliest horizon in the Elbląg group from grave 91 at Młoteczno, where a pair of brooches (Ziemlińska-Odojowa 1991, Fig. 7.5, 7), interpreted as Niemberg type (Kowalski 2000, p.219) were found. Actually, the items were rather inspired by Western originals, and cannot be described as exact imports (Bemmann 2001; Cieśliński 2008, p.124).

II

RESOURCES
OF THE
COMMUNITIES
OF THE
BALTIC
REGION

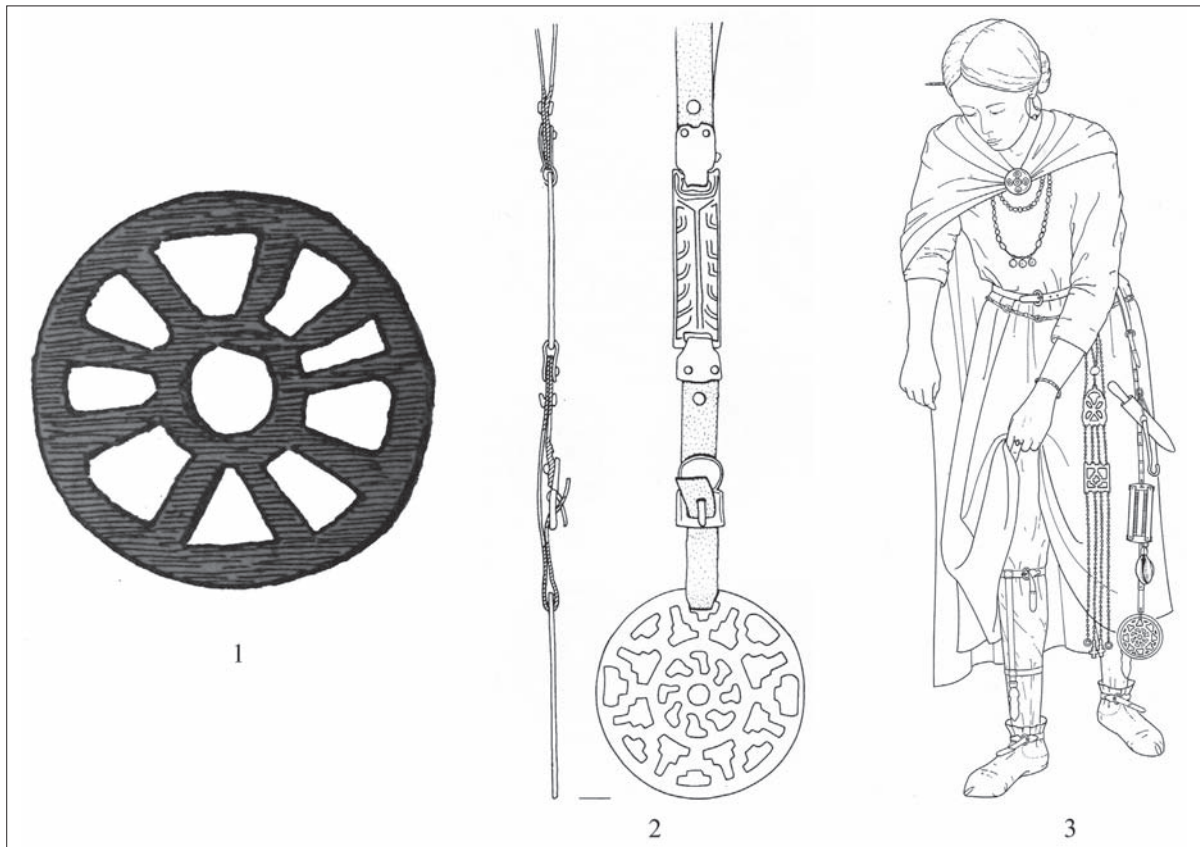


Fig. 5. The openwork circular plate from Pasłek, stray find 1 (after Ehrlich 1923) and possible parallels: 2 München-Aubing, grave 765 (after Dannheimer 1976); 3 a reconstruction of seventh-century Alamannic female attire (after Bertram 2007).

Times of prosperity and its manifestation

It seems extremely important that great affluence is measured by the number of items in graves, but also their opulence is typical of the late stage of the Elbląg group, that is, the late sixth and early seventh centuries (Kontny *et al.* 2011, pp.128-129). Moreover, it can be traced by the number of imported items. Inasmuch as the earliest western influences, pictured by the locally made pliers fibula from Pasłek, appeared at the beginning of the cultural unit (the originals are dated to the late fifth and first half of the sixth century, see: Koch 1998, Pl. 4, pp.403, 405-406, 409), the majority of imports are much later, from the sixth century. Therefore, brooch Type V.2.2.6 after A. Koch, from Komorowo Żuławskie, is proven for its time-span from the early sixth century till circa 600 AD, namely the middle or late sixth century (Koch 1998, p.310ff); beak fibulae Type Høilund Nielsen G1 from the Elbląg group should be placed in the second third of the sixth century, more its later stage (Kontny 2010), similar to the T-shaped fitting from grave 35 at Nowinka (Kontny *et al.* 2011, p.80); the equal-armed brooches and Scandinavian disc brooch from Nowinka from around 530

to 600 AD (Kontny *et al.* 2011, pp.65, 124); and the S-shaped brooches from grave 41 at Nowinka probably to the last third of the sixth century (Kontny *et al.* 2011, p.123). Quite a large group of imports refers to the turn of the sixth and seventh centuries, or slightly later. The button-on-bow brooch from Elbląg, Moniuszki St, feature 2 is dated to Scandinavian Phase VIIA, but also VIIB, and thus mainly to the second half of the sixth and the seventh centuries (Høilund Nielsen 2000, p.163, Figs. 1, 3, 4; Kontny *et al.* 2011, p.67). The belt fittings and other elements decorated in openwork style with L-shape, T-shape and cross-shape motifs, in the Elbląg group, are generally dated to the late sixth and early seventh centuries (Kontny *et al.* 2011, pp.76, 78-80). The shield-on-tongue buckles with elongated ferrule from Elbląg, Moniuszki St, feature 239 (together with the tongue-shaped strap end), or Komorowo Żuławskie are attributed to the second half of the sixth century, or even to the seventh century (Kontny *et al.* 2011, pp.77, 86). The Frankish belt from Nowinka, grave 84, together with the T-shaped belt fitting from Jelonki, is dated to the early seventh century (Kontny, Pietrzak, forthcoming). Thus, we may conclude that the majority of imported goods are proven from the late sixth and early seventh centuries.

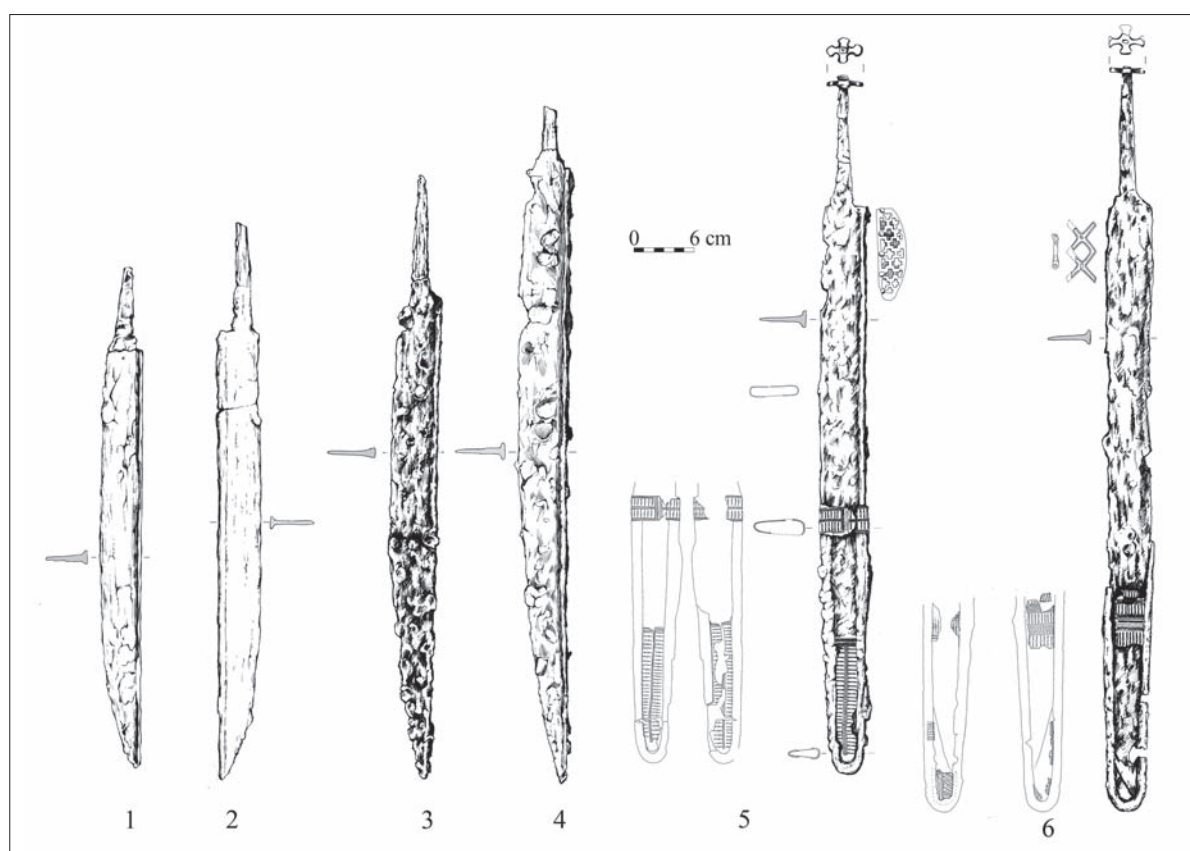


Fig. 6. Seaxes from Nowinka cemetery of the Elbląg group: 1 grave 105; 2 grave 60; 3 grave 21; 4 grave 84; 5 grave 85; 6 grave 17 (after Kontny *et al.* 2011, Pl. LXVII.7, XXXVIII.5, XVII.2, LVII.8, LX.9, X.12); nos 5–6 in ornamental scabbards).

This is also the time when rich weapon graves started to appear in the Elbląg group (Kontny *et al.* 2011, p.89). They were furnished with specialised armaments, namely seaxes (Fig. 6), that developed from a Balt type of weapon, dagger-knives (*Dolchmessern*) (Kontny, forthcoming, 2013). Sometimes they were found in ornamental scabbards fitted with bronze or even silver (Elbląg-Żytno) leaf (Ehrlich 1931a). Also in this period, drinking horns were placed in graves (Kontny *et al.* 2011, p.110ff). We should treat them as symbols of wealth, proven for Vendel culture (Arwidsson 1954, pp.80-81, Pl. 29; 1977, pp.66ff, Pl. 28, 29), but for the Balt area (Lithuania and Latvia) as well (Simniškytė 1998). We are dealing here probably with Scandinavian influences, which is proven for the find from Nowinka, grave 85, where a drinking horn with fittings ornamented in Scandinavian Animal Style II was found (Kontny *et al.* 2011, p.39, Pl. LIX.14). The arrangement of the fittings, typical of the other finds from Nowinka, suggests that the horn was made locally, but the artisan who prepared the decoration definitely had Scandinavian motifs in mind. In that way, the elites of the Elbląg group copied the Scandinavian way of living and burying, plausibly also sharing at least some ideals with them. Was it connected with a warrior society ideology? We may cautiously

say ‘yes’: the Animal Style II, in Scandinavia spotted mainly on weapons, belt fittings, horse harnesses and drinking horns, is acquired as an element of identification of military elites (Hølund Nielsen 1997; 1998).¹⁶ Naturally, the Elbląg group ones were poorer: instead of the glass beakers known from Valsgärde or Vendel, we come across here clay flasks, maybe serving as containers for alcoholic brews (Kontny *et al.* 2011, p.118). Flasks are typically a Sambian cultural ingredient (Okulicz-Kozaryn, Pietrzak 2009), and these areas were probably the cultural core for the Elbląg group.

We should bear in mind that the east and northeast direction of contacts (apart from the Sambian-Natangian area, that is, the Olsztyn group and the West Lithuanian group) is clearly visible in the Elbląg group, but there is nothing surprising in this: we are dealing with the Balt milieu. This could be expressed, for example, in common forms of ladder brooches, fibulae Type *Schlusskreuzfibeln*, belt buckles (for example, Type *Kreuzdornschnalle* or kidney-shape buckles), belt fittings, ornaments like hooked rings, and so on (Kontny *et al.* 2011, *passim*).

¹⁶ The use of the style was further extended to involve the larger part of the community, including women’s jewellery. To a certain extent, it refers to S-brooches from grave 41 at Nowinka, described as an expression of Style II (Rundkvist 2003, p.104).

II

RESOURCES
OF THE
COMMUNITIES
OF THE
BALTIC
REGION

Reasons for the affluence

Here we come to the question how the wealth that characterised the peoples of the lower Vistula in the late sixth and early seventh centuries emerged. The most obvious answer is that they thrived on the amber trade. The handing over of Baltic amber to Theodoric the Great, the ruler of the Ostrogoth state in Italy, is confirmed by Cassiodorus (Cassiodorus, *Variae* V, 2) in a letter written by him on behalf of Theodoric the Great, in thanks for the gift of amber brought by the envoy of the Aestii (the eastern neighbours of the Vidiarii). As Jerzy Kolendo stressed, the writing was in fact a model, not an actual letter, which the Barbarians would probably not have been able to understand. However, this does not mean that the visit by the envoy of the Aestii did not take place; instead it is quite possible that the Aestii came to Italy in order to trade (Kolendo 2009, p.37ff). Although they lived to the east of the Elbląg Upland, numerous cultural similarities allow us to believe that the area of the Elbląg group was also involved in their trade relations. This is suggested by pieces of raw amber and amber beads found in graves (Kontny *et al.* 2011, pp.73-74), as well as by the general opulence of grave furnishings in particular phases (unfortunately, settlements were not excavated, so we cannot check this image by studying other types of archaeological sites). Outside the Elbląg group, amber fragments are proven for burials in the Sambian-Natangian area, the Olsztyn group (Kontny *et al.* 2011, p.73) and Lithuania (Bliujienė 2011). Well-made amber beads were sporadically encountered in the Merovingian circle (Schnurbein 1987, pp.48, 51), where they are considered as imports from the Balt zone (Steuer 1998, p.396; Walter *et al.* 2008, p.27); and in Scandinavia (usually one or two items), where they belong to necklaces together with glass beads (Høilund Nielsen 1987, p.53; Jørgensen 1990, Fig. 28; Jørgensen, Nørgård Jørgensen 1997, p.46). However, they were much more frequently found in the Crimea, in graves from the late sixth and seventh centuries, believed to be Goth women's graves (Chajredinova 1999, pp.87-88, Figs. 71-74; Mastykova 2001), especially the rather irregular forms. Amber of Baltic origin¹⁷ also appeared during the Late Migration Period in the middle Danube area, the Carpathian basin and Eastern Europe, namely the middle Volga basin, the Kama basin, and the foothills of the Ural (Curta 2007, p.67, Maps 4.1, 4.2), which is explained by indirect multi-stage gift exchanges between regional elites. The amber is supposed to have been transported in a raw form, but processed and redistributed locally (Curta 2007, p.67ff); although, taking into consideration that amber beads

¹⁷ Proven by analyses (Bliujienė, Curta 2011, p.30, with further literature).

were only roughly worked both in the Elbląg group and the south or southeast areas, we may say that it could also have been distributed in the form of beads. The simple form of beads does not point to a low level of amber craftsmen. The non-exquisite shape may be treated as an expression of fashion, for example, even today necklaces of crude beads are popular and fashionable in Poland.

Thus, if the supposed mission of the Aestii really happened and was successful, resulting in establishing trade relations between the south Baltic Sea littoral and south or southeast Europe, it is possible to assume one more southern direction from which cultural influences reached the area occupied by the Elbląg group. However, the archaeological material so far does not contain direct evidence of it; with the exception of amber beads, there is nothing in the archaeological record of Hungary to indicate any contacts with the east Baltic area (Bliujienė, Curta 2011, p.56).¹⁸

Apart from amber, salt could also have been a source of wealth. This seems to be supported by the toponyms: Lake Družno (Druso), in the vicinity of Elbląg, and the trading port Truso are names related to salt, for example, the Lithuanian word *druska* means 'salt' (Labuda 1960, pp.22, 24, 36). As there were shortages of salt in Scandinavia¹⁹ (it was obtained only in Denmark, and not from salterns but from sea water, or possibly sea plants, which, bearing in mind the low level of salinity in the Baltic Sea, was not very efficient), it was necessary to import it. A very good source of salt was probably the neighbourhood of Elbląg, inhabited by Balts (Žak 1962, p.194ff). Salterns were not necessarily situated there; it is even more probable that we are dealing with an area where the salt trade was concentrated. It is difficult to decide whether salt was imported from that area during the late sixth to early seventh centuries, but the presence of Scandinavian imports seems to be a strong argument in favour of this idea. It is hardly probable that the object of exchange was brooches, as A. Žak believed (1962, p.258).

It has to be remembered that in the Elbląg group there were favourable conditions to control the sea trade: the area of the Vistula Lagoon was clearly visible from

¹⁸ Such contacts with the Balt milieu were evidenced for slightly earlier chronological stages. Sporadically found southeastern imports from Lithuania allow us to make the conclusion that in the fifth century there were attempts from particular warlords to seek alliances with distant groups in the north European plains (Bliujienė, Curta 2011, pp.56-57). In my opinion, this idea is not absolutely convincing.

¹⁹ To prepare or preserve fish, salt was necessary; semi-industrial production was proven in Denmark in Selsø Vestby by Lejre Vig, starting from the eighth century (Enghoff 1996; Crumlin-Pedersen 2010, p.134, Fig. 5.17).

the slopes and edges of the Elbląg Upland. The lagoon was covered by the Vistula Spit, so it was characterised by calm waters, which were easy to sail on. It was much larger than it is today, reaching far to the south (Kasprzycka 1999; Uścińowicz 2007; Łęczyński *et al.* 2007), although with a lower level than today (about one metre), so the sea trade routes were longer than in later times. Moreover, openings in the spit, allowing ships to sail in and out, were more frequent than today, which also favoured sailing there. The only problem was a place for a safe landing: such spots were rare in the Vistula Bay. Nevertheless, in the vicinity of Tolkmicko, there were favourable conditions in the Middle Ages to create a harbour, that is, there was a natural bay here (Uścińowicz 2007; Łęczyński *et al.* 2007). In Tolkmicko a hill-fort also existed (Ebert 1927, pp.109-117; Ehrlich 1931b, pp.55ff; Dmochowski 1963, pp.271-286). The middle phase of it, as is presumed, embraced the period between the sixth and the ninth centuries (Jagodziński 1997, pp.34-35). It is probable that the settlers used the necropolis at Nowinka (Kontny *et al.* 2011, p.127), so we could be dealing with an important settlement nucleus. It is no wonder that so many imports and opulent graves have been excavated here.

Sea routes and boats

So now we come to the question of sea routes. Routes linking the North Sea and the Baltic Sea along the seashore, across the land, sometimes with the use of rivers, have been postulated for the Pre-Roman Period (Bochnak 2010). The idea is based on the spread of particular imported goods, as well as the concept that paddlers-retinue members who attacked the area of Hjortspring on the Isle of Als had come from the Hamburg region (Randsborg 1995, pp.63-73). This hypothesis does not seem absolutely convincing, firstly because the fatherland of the attackers is not set precisely: the pyxides from Hjortspring, which served for Klaus Randsborg as the main evidence for the 'Hamburg' idea, were spotted not only in the Lower Elbe basin, but also on Bornholm (an exact analogy from Egebygård) or Gotland (Kaul 2003, Fig. 4.17, 18), and there are Scandinavian (Kvärlöv in Skåne) similarities in the shape of shield bosses from Hjortspring (Martens 2001). As was reasonably stated by Flemming Kaul, we shall probably never know from exactly where the defeated invaders of the Hjortspring area originated (Kaul 2003, pp.176-177). Secondly, as refers to the location of imports, it speaks for the existence of the sea route, but only on a small, supplementary scale. Nevertheless, there was a long tradition of trade with the Roman Empire, namely in the Younger and Late

Roman Period (Lund Hansen 1987, p.248ff), during which cultural (trade) centres on Zealand, that is, Himmeloje (Lund Hansen 1995), and later on Funen, that is, Gudme-Lundeborg (Grimm, Pesch 2011), were of great importance (Crumlin-Pedersen 1991a; Näsman 1991). The Baltic Sea also served as a route for military purposes (von Carnap-Bornheim 1997), which resulted in the creation of means like marine features to control sea traffic, that is, various types of fjord barrage construction (Nørgård Jørgensen 2003). Naturally, we do not know the exact routes for the Migration Period, although they were generally along the coasts (Crumlin-Pedersen 1987, p.112ff) for safety reasons (the possibility to land in the event of bad weather), navigation methods (the compass was still unknown, so landmarks were the most convenient navigation points), and probably the lack of space aboard for food supplies for the numerous crew (the limited space was needed for cargo) and no capacity for preparing meals. Sleeping on board was not convenient either. Nevertheless, some areas were not to be missed. They had a unique position, owing to the island's location, like Sorte Muld on Bornholm (Adamsen *et al.* 2009), Funen with Lundeborg (Thomsen 1991), and to a certain degree Gotland (Carlsson 1991), and surely also the peninsula situation was an advantage, see Uppåkra in Skåne (Helgesson 2002; Hårdh 2002). For later times, it is clearer, as the trading ports which appeared in particular places changed the pattern of the trade routes, which started to link these harbours (central places). This is, of course, proven by the quite numerous Medieval descriptions, for example, of Ottar's (Batley, Englert 2007) and Wulfstan's (Englert, Trakadas 2009) voyages, described by Alfred the Great in the late ninth century.

As refers to the Roman Period, we do not know whether trade was done with the use of Roman or local vessels, although the latter seems to me more probable. During the Migration Period, it seems obvious that locally made boats were in use. We know of the Roman Period Scandinavian boats Nydam A, Nydam B and Nydam C (Rieck 2003), together with expanded log boats from the same period (Crumlin-Pedersen 1991b; Natuniewicz-Sekuła, Rein-Seehusen 2010), and a lot of Medieval trading and military vessels (Crumlin-Pedersen 1991c; 2009; 2010, pp.95-124; Crumlin-Pedersen, Olsen 2002; McGrail 2001, pp.207-229). Nevertheless, the Migration Period boats from the Baltic Sea zone remain almost unknown (Fig.7). We should list a few representations shown on stones from Gotland, namely Bro Kyrka I, dated to the fifth century (Lindquist 1941-1942, Pl. 5.11; Crumlin-Pedersen 2010, Fig. 6.3), the so-called Häggeby stone (Uppland in Sweden) from circa 600 AD (Brögger, Shetelig 1953,

II

RESOURCES
OF THE
COMMUNITIES
OF THE
BALTIC
REGION

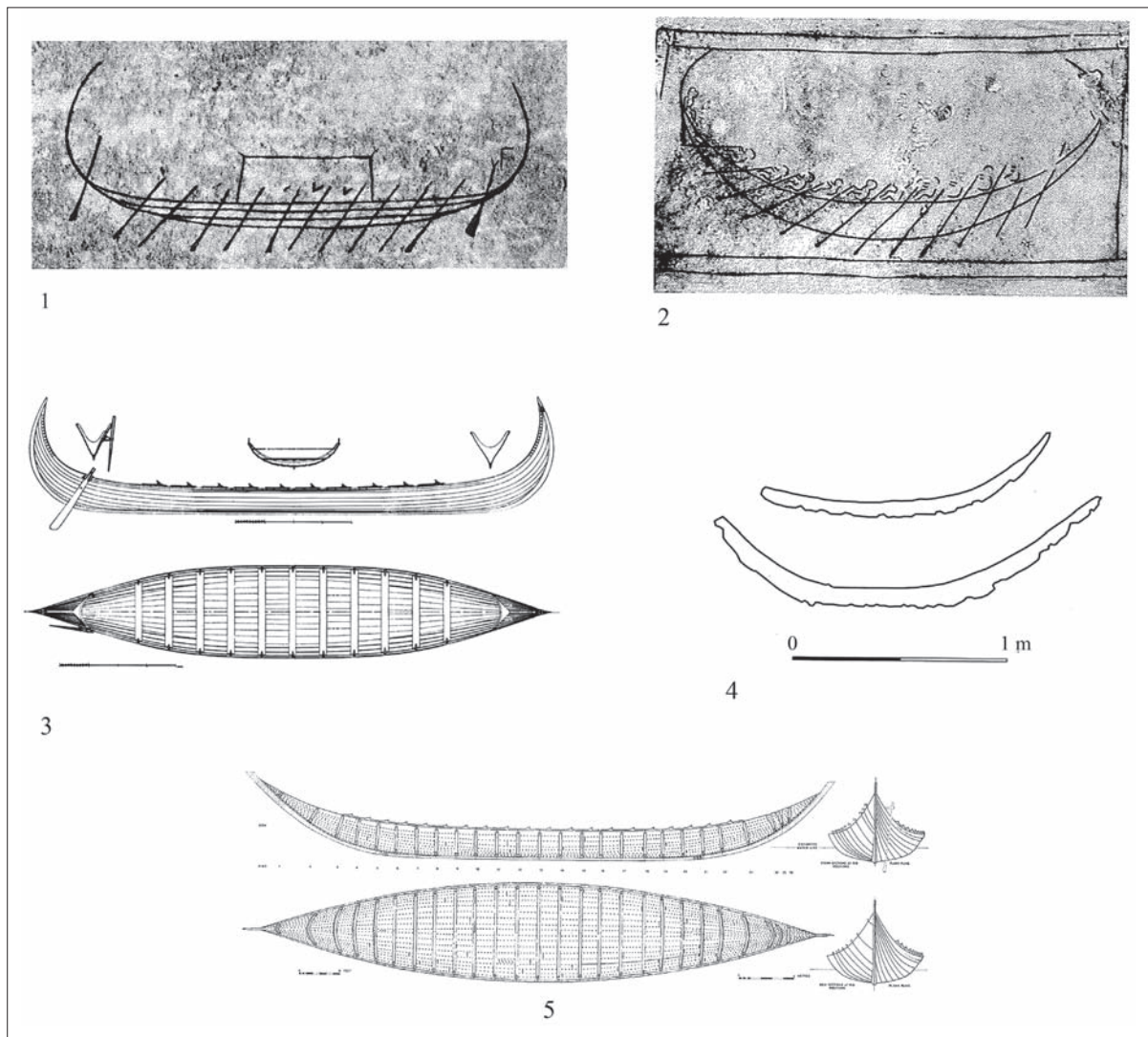


Fig. 7. Examples of Migration Period boats in the Baltic Sea region, compared to the Sutton Hoo boat: 1 a representation on the Bro Kyrka I stone (after Lindquist 1941–1942); 2 the Häggeby stone (after Brögger, Shetelig 1953); 3 the boat Kvalsund II (after Shetelig, Johannessen 1929); 4 strakes from Puck Bay (after Ossowski 2010); 5 the Sutton Hoo boat (after Bruce-Mitford 1975).

p.52; Crumlin-Pedersen 2010, Fig. 4.4), the Vendel Period ship graves from Valsgårde (Varenius 1995), the boat Kvalsund II in Sunnmøre (Norway) ¹⁴C -dated to circa 700 AD (Christensen 1996, p.81), chopped into pieces before depositing in a Norway bog (Shetelig, Johannessen 1929). Additionally, we have the world-famous Sutton Hoo boat grave in East Anglia, from the early seventh century (Bruce-Mitford 1975), which was probably of Scandinavian origin (McGrail 2001, pp.210-211; Crumlin-Pedersen 2010, pp.96-97). It has quite a good analogy (treenails used to fasten strakes) in the boat from Gredstebro (circa 700 AD) on the west coast of Jutland (Crumlin-Pedersen 1997a, pp.289ff). Lately, such boats were also confirmed in Poland: two strakes similar to ones from Nydam were found in Puck Bay: ¹⁴C dates put their chronology down to the Late Roman and Migration Period (Ossowski 2010,

p.169, Fig. 158). They were lashed to cleats in planks: a technique that was in use until circa 800 AD.

Therefore, if we consider Migration Period boats, we may think about double-ended, plank-first made ones, with clinker planking fastened by rivets, equipped with a side paddle steer beam or even a T-shape keel. They could have measured from about ten to 25 metres, and were propelled by two rows of oarsmen (one per side)²⁰ only, with the use of quite long oars in rowlocks.²¹

²⁰ The number of oarsmen varies from a few to more than 20. In the case of the biggest boat (Sutton Hoo), it ranges from 28 to 40 oarsmen (McGrail 2001, p.211).

²¹ There is no firm evidence that sail was in use here before 800 AD (in the British and Irish archipelago, it was introduced in the sixth century, see McGrail 2001, pp.206-207), although some scholars assume that it appeared in the seventh century; the further presumption is based on the disputable dating of certain stelae from Gotland,

These were two-purpose boats: for military and simultaneously trade purposes. This seems to be proven by their dimensions and their non-specialised shapes. Additionally, the lack of sail resulted in the need for numerous oarsmen. Therefore, we may reasonably think that warriors-oarsmen (the military crew of row boats is evidenced by, for example, the Nydam finds) were strongly involved in trade, as they sailed the only larger type of ship known during these times. At the same time, they also had to defend the boat; moreover, a numerous crew gives the impression of power and efficiency, which had to be important for military-oriented societies (McGrail 2001, p.212; Crumlin-Pedersen 2010, pp.97-98).

The political situation

As refers to the political situation in these times, it seems that southern Scandinavia subordinated vast parts of the Baltic Sea. This is proven by the spread of south Scandinavian ornaments and costume elements, frequently decorated in the Animal Style II in north and northeast Europe (Høilund Nielsen 2000), but also to the southeast (the Elbląg group). A further sign of it is the multiplication of stone fortresses on Oland (Eketorp, Ismantorp, Graborg, and so on), situated in central, strategically convenient parts of the island (Näsman 1997), which shows the danger. Concurrently, southern Scandinavia itself was not endangered: we may draw this conclusion by taking into consideration the lack of fjord obstacles-barrages. Aimed to prevent attacks or slow down their impetus to prepare for better defence, they were popular here in the Late Roman and Medieval Period (Nørgård Jørgensen 1997; 2001; 2002; Daly 2001). Their lack in the sixth and early seventh centuries seems to show that a kind of local, south Scandinavian ‘Pompey the Great’ of unknown name (or more of them) was to suppress the local powers acting as pirates. As a result, trade, naturally controlled by the south Scandinavians, could have blossomed. Let me recall here, apart from the well-known Scandinavian finds from Grobina (Nerman 1958), also the extraordinary find from Salme on Saaremaa, where a boat mass-grave of Scandinavian origin from the mid-seventh century was excavated lately (Konsa *et al.* 2008). Moreover, the next mass boat-grave (Salme II)

an imprecisely dated (seventh century?) image of a ship engraved on a pebble from Karlby in Denmark (Crumlin-Pedersen 2010, Fig. 4.7), and the strongly castigated experiment (Gifford 1995) with a half-scale model of the Sutton Hoo boat furnished with a sail (Westerdahl 1995; Christensen 1996, pp.79-86; McGrail 2001, p.211ff; Crumlin-Pedersen 1997b, p.188ff; 2010, pp.97-98).

was discovered here in 2011.²² Although their interpretation is not absolutely clear, it shows beyond doubt that the Scandinavians went far. The activity of south Scandinavian sailors/merchants/warriors could also have touched distant areas: the occurrence of typical horse harness elements in Austria was treated as proof of the use of south Scandinavian retinues in the Merovingian world by Karen Høilund Nielsen (2003).²³ It is unknown whether Scandinavian patrons used local military resources to make trade safe, or whether they just collaborated with them on an equal level. Surely local retinues, penetrating the Elbląg Upland on their small horses (Kontny *et al.* 2009), kept their own cultural character.

Conclusions

To sum up, if we try to trace elements showing sources of power, we should use the concept IEMP (Ideological, Economic, Military, Political sources of power), after Michael Mann (1986). Therefore, we may pinpoint characteristics of:

- ideological power, that is, attributes of the elite (feasting equipment, costume elements, horse equipment), and maybe also religion, but we know almost nothing definite concerning this
- economic power: trade (amber and salt?)
- military power: richly equipped weapon graves
- political power: possible Scandinavian patrons

It is impossible to assume the gradation of their significance. Moreover, we cannot neglect fortunate circumstances that appeared in the late sixth and early seventh centuries, that is, the domination of the Baltic Sea zone by the south Scandinavians, the demand for amber and salt, and so on. It is also possible that new, common ideas were needed for the identity of a multi-ethnic society. Naturally, the concept presented here is of a hypothetical character, and to solve this puzzle adequately, we have to wait for another invention: a time machine ...

²² Personal communication: Mirja Ots (Institute of History, Tallinn University) (Alas 2011).

²³ This concept seems to me not so simple to solve: elements hinted at by K. Høilund Nielsen, namely tongue-shaped strap-ends and rectangular connectors with a step pattern, were actually equally or even more popular in the Merovingian milieu than in Scandinavia (Kontny *et al.* 2011, pp.85-86, 102-103; Kontny, Pietrzak, forthcoming, 2012), so it requires a precise chronological analysis (which we lack) to pinpoint their origin.

II

RESOURCES
OF THE
COMMUNITIES
OF THE
BALTIC
REGION

Archival sources

Jakobson files

Files of Feliks Jakobson collected in Latvijas nacionālais vēstures muzejs in Riga; see Jakobson 2009.

Voigtmann files

Files of Kurt Voigtmann housed in Museum für Vor- und Frühgeschichte in Berlin.

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(ELBLONGO GRUPĖ)**

BARTOSZ KONTNY

Santrauka

Šiame straipsnyje pristatoma Elblongo (lenk. Elbląg) grupė savo klestėjimo laikotarpiu, t. y. VI a. po Kr. pabaiga 7 a. pradžia. Straipsnyje daugiausia aptariami skandinaviški importiniai radiniai ir dirbiniai, patekę iš Merovingų valdomos frankų teritorijos. Faktiškai importiniai radiniai – tai prabangos reikmenys. Straipsnyje analizuojami Elblongo grupės gamtos išteklių ir prekės, kuriomis šie žmonės prekiaavo (gintaras, galbūt ir druska). Analizuojama Elblongo grupės geostrateginė pozicija, taip pat jūros prekybos keliai ir laivai, naudoti Baltijos jūroje Tautų kraustymosi laikotarpiu pabaigoje. Kontaktai tarp Pietų Skandinavijos ir Elblongo grupės yra atskleidžiami plačiame politiniame ir kultūriniame kontekste (1–8 pav.; III iliustr.).

Vertė Romas Jarockis

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