

## Chapter 10: Viking Age and early medieval Eastern Baltic between the West and the East<sup>1</sup>

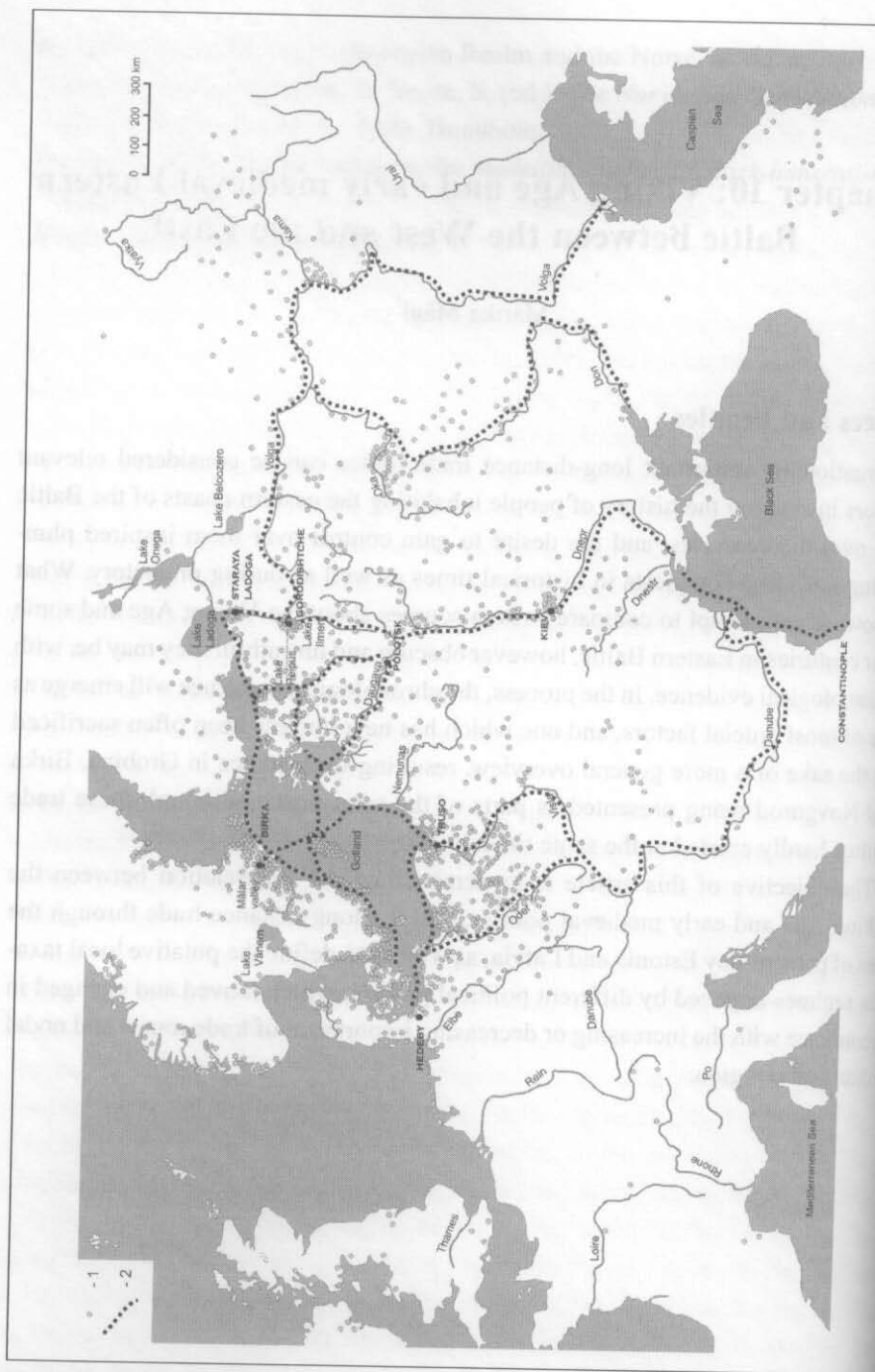
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### Places and Peoples

Internationally important long-distance trade routes can be considered relevant factors in shaping the history of people inhabiting the eastern coasts of the Baltic Sea over the centuries, and the desire to gain control over them inspired plundering raids and conquests in historical times as well as during prehistory. What follows is an attempt to compare written sources about the Viking Age and some later centuries in Eastern Baltic, however obscure and untruthful they may be, with archaeological evidence. In the process, the chronological sequence will emerge as one of most crucial factors, and one which has nevertheless been often sacrificed for the sake of a more general overview, resulting for instance in Grobiņa, Birka and Novgorod being presented as parts of the same scene, although these trade centres hardly existed at the same time.

The objective of this article is to demonstrate the interrelation between the Viking-Age and early medieval politics, and the long-distance trade through the area of present-day Estonia and Latvia, as well as to define the putative local taxation regimes imposed by different political powers, which moved and changed in accordance with the increasing or decreasing importance of trade routes and nodal points in the region.

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Map of the most important trade routes through the eastern part of Europe in the pre-Viking and Viking Age. 1 – finds of Kufic coins, 2 – trade routes. The finds of Kufic coins are given according to: Jansson 2000b, Fig. 3; Steuer 2009, Fig. 2; Leimus 2007.

Making use of the land mass of the Eastern Baltic was unavoidable for traffic bound to the area of present-day Russia in the Viking Age, even when sailing through the Gulf of Finland. The earlier seafaring technology did not allow passage between the Swedish coast and the eastern end of the Gulf of Finland without stops, and the rocky southern coast of Finland with its numerous reefs was presumably one reason why the sailing route followed the densely inhabited North-Estonian coast instead.<sup>2</sup> At the point where the sea-route turned down from the south-western Finnish coast towards the southern coast of the Gulf of Finland, we find at one of the most suitable natural landing places in North-Estonia, in the lower reaches of the River Pirita, the Viking Age hill-fort and trade centre of Iru, the predecessor of medieval Tallinn.<sup>3</sup>

From the eastern end of the Gulf of Finland it was possible to continue along the Lakes Ladoga and Onega further towards the east or south-east, or – the probably more intensively used –, to turn first towards the south to the trade centre at Staraya Ladoga, then to Novgorod and/or Rjyurik Gorodishche, and from Lake Ilmen along several rivers to the Volga River and the Caspian Sea.<sup>4</sup>

It was possible to continue from Lake Ilmen towards the south, along several rivers and watersheds, and reach the River West-Dvina at approximately the location of the later Vitebsk. The rest was the generally known Great Route along the River Dnepr to Byzantium. This way was described as ‘the Route from the Varangians to the Greeks’ in the Russian Primary Chronicle, which was written in the early 12<sup>th</sup> century and accordingly reflected the reality of this time. However, the route made a very large detour for travellers heading to the south. At least before the end of the 10<sup>th</sup> century, when the political situation in the region became more stable and the urban centre emerged in Novgorod it was likely that the merchants preferred to travel this way when heading to the Volga-Bulgar area or even further east.<sup>5</sup>

The most intensively used Viking Age route from the Baltic Sea to Byzantium probably ran along the River Daugava/West-Dvina in present-day Latvia and Belarus. Using watersheds, it was then possible to move forward to the River Dnepr, sail to Kiev, and from there further south to Byzantium.

Departing from Central Sweden, the core areas of the Svea state, one could sail along the Finnish and Estonian coasts as described above, and turn down along the River Narva to Lakes Peipsi and Pihkva/Pskov between present-day Estonia and Russia. The route continued along the River Velikaja, and, through Pskov in its

2 For a description of the route in a 13<sup>th</sup> century document see e.g. Edgren 1995.

3 Mägi 2007b.

4 See also Nosov et al 2005: 23; Nosov & Khvoshchinskaya 2006.

5 E.g. Jansson 1997; Nosov 2001; Nosov et al 2005: 23–32.

lower reaches, directly southwards, where it crosses a watershed to link up with the West-Dvina-Dnepr route at Polotsk. Both Pskov and Polotsk got their start earlier than Novgorod, in the 10<sup>th</sup> century at the latest.<sup>6</sup>

Trade routes over North-East European rivers were quite complicated for travel. Most of them contained rapids and waterfalls, were partly simply too small or too shallow for navigation, which meant re-loading cargo several times, as well as having to use vessels more suitable for rivers than sea-sailing.<sup>7</sup> Even the Daugava River, which has the greatest flow of water in the region, was characterised by more than one hundred rapids merely in the territory of present-day Latvia.<sup>8</sup> Several researchers have recently also pointed to the importance of winter routes in historical long-distance trade in the North, in which the frozen river systems might have been in intensive use.<sup>9</sup>

In these conditions, another alternative when heading to Byzantium through the Eastern Baltic was a less known trade route through Central-Estonian river systems, along the present-day Pärnu, Navesti, Tännassilma and Emajõgi Rivers, through the East-Estonian trade centre Tartu to Lake Peipsi and further on to Pskov, where it was possible to continue as described above. Although in central Estonia it now consists of smaller and non-navigable rivers,<sup>10</sup> it has been marked as one large river on nearly all medieval or early modern maps, and the route has been mapped separately even as late as the 17<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>11</sup> The route might, however, been especially convenient in winter time. Frozen rivers and wetlands were of special importance as communication routes in the heavily forested areas of north-eastern Europe. Travelling through central Estonia in winter-time, it was possible to transport loads quickly over not only rivers but also the extensive wetlands around them. Even in summer, to travel along this way was longer than sailing directly to Daugava, but demanded fewer re-loading of goods, thus making the transportation of them cheaper, less laborious, and perhaps altogether even faster.

Whatever the route chosen, it ran through the territory of either present-day Latvia or Estonia. Descriptions and remarks in early medieval chronicles and Scandinavian sagas leave no doubt that the surrounding political powers and nascent states in the Viking Age were already clearly making efforts to guarantee

6 Gurevitch 1970; Nosov et al 2005: 119.

7 E g Sindbæk 2003.

8 Radiņš 1998.

9 E g Sindbæk 2003; 2005: 247–54 and references.

10 Both rivers and wetlands must have been bigger in the Viking Age. Later changes in West-Estonian terrain have been caused by land mass upheaval and reversion to swamps, making the rivers in Central Estonia difficult to navigate.

11 Ehrensverd 2001: 64–5.



safe passage through the Eastern Baltic areas. In reality it meant several military campaigns against people inhabiting these strategically important areas, resulting not only in plundering but their more or less lasting status as tributary or tax-paying lands. Treaties guaranteeing safe passage for probably both parties were integral parts of this status.<sup>12</sup>

Written sources mentioning the Viking Age conditions in Eastern Baltic are however rare and often tendentious; somewhat more is known from the 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> centuries. One of the many difficulties in reconstructing the situation 1000 years ago is also the present political situation in North-East Europe, where national paradigms in different states tend to bias the interpretations.



Map of the areas and places mentioned in the article

12 See also Blomkvist 2009.

Considering the situation in the Viking Age and even later, it is of importance to interpret place names appearing in the few written documents dealing with such early periods in the North. Even if places with the same names still exist today, and the interpretation of names in medieval sagas or chronicles therefore seems to be above suspicion, it is seldom so simple. The use and interconnection of the names Couronia (*Kurland*), Estonia (*Estland*) and Sembia/Semigallia (*Samland*, *Semland*, *Simkala*, and *Sembia*) should be the first to be considered.

Saaremaa (Scan. and Germ. *Ösel*) is often referred to in Old Norse sources as *Eysysla*, in contrast to *Adalsysla*, which is believed to have been designated as mainland Estonia.<sup>13</sup> In history Saaremaa, however, covered all the Estonian islands. The biggest of them, which now bears the name Saaremaa (appr. 'The District/Land of Islands'), had until the early 19<sup>th</sup> century a parallel name *Kuresaar* or *Kurasaar* (Couronian / Cour Island). Given the former broader meaning of Saaremaa-Ösel it is logical to assume that Kuresaar was the original name of the biggest island of *Ösel*, and this is reinforced by the cultural unity that is obvious in the archaeological evidence in present-day Couronia and Saaremaa (see below).

The confusion with the earliest district names in Eastern Baltic can be even more complicated. Saaremaa in Latvian is *Samzala* (i.e. Sam-Island), while Sami or Samit was at least historically used for the Finnic population.<sup>14</sup> For instance in historical Couronia Sami(t) implies Finnic-speaking inhabitants, probable immigrants from Saaremaa.<sup>15</sup> Could the pair of names 'Cour-Land' and 'Cour-Island' (Estonian *Kuramaa* and *Kurasaar*), as was demonstrated above, be equated with 'Sam-Land' and 'Sam-Island'? Samland or Semland occurs comparatively often in early writings and is traditionally believed to have applied to *Samland*/*Sembia*/*Sambia* on the Prussian coast, where a peninsula of *Sambia*, in German *Samland* still exists, or sometimes Semigallia in present-day Latvia and Lithuania.<sup>16</sup> However, it is not entirely unlikely that Samland, at least in some sources, has denoted the same area as Kurland, perhaps together with the Kur-Island, especially in cases when the description of the district would actually be better suited to some coastal region and not historical Semigallia, which is an inland district separated from the coast by a broad zone of wetlands. Names connected with Sam and Kur can refer to

13 E.g. Tarvel 1994.

14 Sami people (as they are known now in the northern part of Scandinavia and Finland) were in earlier sources always referred as *Fenni*, *Screrefennae*, *Terfinnas*, or something similar. It is another example of how names have moved in the course of time – these ethnonyms became the name of present Finland (e.g. Valtonen 2007).

15 Johansen 1939: 277.

16 E.g. Mickevičius 1994; Tarvel 1994; Mugurevičs 2000.

ethnic differences, and Samland and Kurland accordingly to approximately the same coastal zone of the whole Eastern Baltic.

Another example is the name Rus or Russia, which in several Viking Age narratives is very closely connected with maritime culture and activities, or simply is used in connections which in the Viking Age context was more appropriate to some Eastern Baltic coastal areas than Russia as it existed after the turn of the millennium. Access from the 11<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup>-century Russia to the Baltic Sea was quite complicated, and actually only possible along rivers that were very difficult to navigate with sea-going vessels, demanding frequent portaging, if not an actual change of ship type. It is important to keep in mind that the south-eastern coast of the Gulf of Finland between present-day Estonia and the Karelian Isthmus was, and still is, a big wetland area that in the Viking Age was more or less unpopulated. Therefore, access to the sea from Novgorod was only through the water route along Lake Ladoga and the River Neva, while Staraya Ladoga was probably the furthest place to sail directly with sea-faring ships. It was not much easier to reach Pskov through the rivers and lakes between present-day Estonia and Russia. More than a hundred impassable rapids blocked the direct route to Polotsk along the River Daugava. Plundering raids into what is now Russia must have been very difficult to carry out in these conditions, although Scandinavian sources comparatively often mention such Viking-style ravaging expeditions to Rus.

The 12<sup>th</sup> century writers of sagas and chronicles, in which Viking Age narratives are cited, probably simply translated the old Scandinavian name *Gardaríke* as Russia, in the way that this place-name was used in their time. Viking Age *Gardaríke*, however, probably did not cover directly the area of 11<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup>-century Russia, but presumably also covered some coastal districts in the Eastern Baltic.<sup>17</sup> It may especially be true for these regions that paid taxes to the Novgorodian Princes, first of all the North Estonian coast<sup>18</sup>, but also some districts along the River Daugava.<sup>19</sup>

17 The old name of *Gardaríke*, meaning approximately 'The Kingdom of Towns', expresses perfectly the Viking Age reality – coming from Scandinavia, where such early fortifications were rare, the abundance of fortifications was the most striking peculiarity in the eastern coast of the Baltic Sea. In the Viking Age they were generally not particularly strongly fortified, in most cases more like manors or small 'towns' on top of some hill, surrounded by a wooden fence. Scandinavian 'gard' was probably the best term describing them.

18 See also Melnikova & Petrukhin 1991.

19 The name 'Russia' has also had a different meaning later. In 1188 Pope Clemens III confirmed the foundation of Yxkyl Bishopric near Riga in the estuary of the River Daugava. The new bishopric was described as being situated in Russia (in Ruthenia) though (Selart 2002, 72 and references).

## Eastern Baltic areas in pre-Viking and early Viking Age (appr. 600–950)

### *Written sources*

Talking of times before the Viking Age, Estonia has been mentioned in *Ynglinga Saga* in Snorri Sturluson's *Heimskringla* (written down in the beginning of the 13<sup>th</sup> century), as well as in *Historia Norwegiae*, in connection with the Swedish king Yngvar's plundering raids to Estonia, which he used to try to stop Estonian Vikings ('*Vikingr frá Esthland*') ravaging Sweden. King Yngvar was killed on Ösel ('*Eysysla*'). It is also worth mentioning that the Estonians were called *Sýslu kind*, which in southern Scandinavia was a term for a tax-paying district. Later Yngvar's son Anund revenged his father with, on this occasion, a victorious campaign to Estonia.<sup>20</sup> These events have been dated to the early 7<sup>th</sup> century, which, in any case, is a time before the Viking Age.

A longer narrative about the Viking Age Eastern Baltic can be found in *Rimbert's chronicle Vita Ansgarii*, written in the 870s. There is a description of the Swedish king Olof's campaign to Couronia in 854, where they conquered two strongholds – Seeburg and Aputra. The first one is commonly identified as Grobiņa in present-day Latvia<sup>21</sup>, and the second one as Apuole in present-day Lithuania.<sup>22</sup> The chronicle declares that Cori had been in subjection to the Swedes, and then had rebelled. After that, the Danes had tried to subdue them, but with no success. King Olaf, however, conquered both strongholds again, as a result of which the Cori promised to be obedient to the rule of the Swedish king, to pay tribute as before, and to give hostages.<sup>23</sup> This is a perfect description of the Viking Age dependency of a taxation land.<sup>24</sup>

The legend of the Varangian brothers becoming the leaders of the Russian state dates back to the 9<sup>th</sup> century, too, although chronicles mentioning it were written in the early 12<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>25</sup> *The Nestor's Chronicle* announces that in the year 859 the Varangians came over the sea, and took tribute from the Chuds, the Slovens, the Merians, and the Krivichians.<sup>26</sup> The first of these ethnonyms, the Chuds, are believed to be the ancestors of the Finnic-speaking inhabitants in present-day

20 Ynglingatal, 25–26; Ynglinga Saga, 36–37; The History of Norway, 13, 20–24.

21 Eg Nerman 1958.

22 Lamm et al 2009.

23 Rimbert, XXX.

24 Blomkvist 2009.

25 Melnikova 2007 and references.

26 *Nestors krönike*, year 859 (6367), 30.

Estonia, and perhaps also North-West Russia.<sup>27</sup> After having driven the Scandinavians out soon after that – which, as we could see from other sources, happened quite often in the unstable political circumstances of the Viking Age – they had to ask them to come back soon afterwards, according to the chronicler, in order to stop fighting among themselves. Whatever the real situation, some Swedish supremacy was thereupon established in the territory of the later state of Novgorod.

The subsequent notification in the chronicles, that two years later Rjyurik of Novgorod had taken over the estates of his brothers, and become ruler of the whole Rus state, probably indicates the gradual concentration of power in one centre – Gorodishche.<sup>28</sup> The list of ethnicities and their centres that follows is also of special interest – here are mentioned the same ethnic groups as before, except the *Chuds*. Their probable ‘centre’, Irbozka,, is also not named<sup>29</sup>, and hence the *Chuds* were, in the 9<sup>th</sup>-century context, not among those who paid tribute to the Varangians. The ethnonym *Chuds*, however, appears in numerous places later in the chronicle.<sup>30</sup> In connection with the problem of the Chuds it has been suggested that the term (*Rus*) when first used might have embraced not only ‘proper’ Scandinavians but also the very Scandinavianised, perhaps mixed, population in North-Estonia.<sup>31</sup> Late prehistoric material culture on Estonian coasts and islands was clearly different than in the inland areas of the country, making it possible that only the inhabitants in the inland area were called Chudi in the Viking Age.

*Nestor’s Chronicle* continues with a description of how Rjyurik gradually seized the areas further south, and in 882 made Kiev the capital of his state. Novgorod had to pay tax to the Varangians, which, according to the chronicle, was paid until the second decade of the 11<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>32</sup>

### *Saxo’s mythological kings and heroes*

From the Scandinavian side, there have been several mentions of Eastern Baltic areas in connection with Viking raids. The most comprehensive overview of Viking Age Scandinavians’ interests is probably given in *Gesta Danorum* by Saxo Grammaticus. It was however written in the early 13<sup>th</sup> century, and the earlier, semi-

27 Melnikova & Petrukhin 1991.

28 Novgorod mentioned in the chronicle must actually have been Rjyurik Gorodishche, since Novgorod did not exist before the late 10<sup>th</sup> century (Nosov et al 2005, 31–32).

29 *Nestors krönike*, year 859 (6367) 32.

30 Finnic-speaking population in the areas east of Lake Peipsi were called Chuds even in the 18<sup>th</sup> century (Öpik 1970). By now they have all been assimilated with the Russians.

31 Melnikova & Petrukhin 1991 and references.

32 *Nestors krönike*, year 882 (6390), 34–35.



mythological history of Denmark that is described there is therefore not of very high credibility. Still, the author has apparently used some earlier sources, sagas and stories based on oral tradition – stories that because of some features (for instance Russia as a notable political power in the East) fit mainly in a Viking Age context, are often attributed to heroic kings from an undefined past. A part of these narratives is probably based on real happenings and persons, although these have been seen through the prism of the late 12<sup>th</sup> to early 13<sup>th</sup> century and Saxo's own objectives.

Saxo gives us a story of the Danish mythological king Haddings, who declared war on Lokero, the king of the Couronians, but was defeated, taken prisoner and escaped. After that he attacked King Handwanus in Hellespont (probably the River Daugava), who was living within an impregnable defensive wall in his city Duna. Haddings managed by subterfuge to set the hill-fort on fire and then to seize it; the conquest, however, cannot be considered complete since thereafter Haddings accepted gold for the ransom of the King of Hellespont, and left.<sup>33</sup> Hadding's son Frode attacked Couronia again, and this time apparently more successfully. Having taken the stronghold where the Couronian King Dorno had defended himself, Frode sailed further and met a Russian (Rutenae) chieftain Tranno with war ships. The victory over him apparently ended with a promise to pay tribute, after which Frode returned to Denmark.<sup>34</sup>

The tribute, however, was never paid, and Frode sailed back to Russia with his troops. The first fortress he seized was called Rotala, and was protected by a river. Frode managed to drain the river, and attacked the hill-fort, which, without the natural protection, probably was not particularly fortified, so that it was easily conquered. After Rotala, Frode seized another stronghold, Paltisca, and aspired thereafter to subordinate the whole of the East (Orient). Pursuing this objective, he again attacked Handvan, the King of Hellespont, and managed to take one of his strongholds. It is however difficult to see the story described to us by Saxo as a complete victory. Frode apparently tried to woo Handvan's daughter but was refused, and simply sailed back home.<sup>35</sup>

These stories include several fabulous details, and are often given as examples of the incredibility of *Gesta Danorum's* first books.<sup>36</sup> Nor is anything known of the time of these adventures, but if something like this ever took place, it must have happened in the first half of the Viking Age, and so most probably during the 9<sup>th</sup> or early 10<sup>th</sup> century.

33 Saxo's *Danmarks Historie* 1. 6. 7–10, 44–45.

34 Ibid. 2. 1. 4–6, 66–67.

35 Ibid. 2. 1. 7–9, 68–70.

36 E.g. Mickevičius 1994; Tarvel 1994.





Iru hill-fort in 1930s. Photograph in the topographic archives at the Institute of History, Tallinn University.

Nevertheless, taking into account the archaeological evidence of the early Viking Age, and the fact that the place-names used in this period probably did not correspond directly to their use in later times, the core of these narratives appears in a logical context. Couronia and Hellespont seem to have a closer connection in Saxo's narratives than would be suggested by the geographical distance between (southern) Couronia and the River Daugava.<sup>37</sup> This is however easily understandable if we assume that Couronia (*Kurland?*) in the early Viking Age might have embraced the Kurzeme peninsula together with the Island of Saaremaa. The presence of both northern Couronians (or the Couronian Livs) and the Osilians in the estuary of the River Daugava can be seen in the archaeological material in the 10<sup>th</sup> century at the latest, and the 'Semigallian' archaeological culture suggested by several Latvian archaeologists in the lower reaches of the River Daugava before that time<sup>38</sup> is nearly identical with that known from Saaremaa.<sup>39</sup>

The Danes used their ships for sailing to the sites of their eastern raids, which restricts the area under question to the coastal zone or nearby area, or the area along

37 See e.g. Mickevičius 1994.

38 E.g. Radinš 1998.

39 Mägi 2005.

some bigger water routes navigable with sea-going vessels. It is therefore possible to speculate that one of the hill-forts that Frode seized, Rotala, could possibly represent Iru in present-day Tallinn, since it seems to be the only one along the Eastern Baltic coast corresponding – surprisingly well, – to the description given by Saxo (Fig. p. 199). Starting from the 6<sup>th</sup> century and until approximately the year 1000, Iru (or Rāvala, as it might have been called earlier) was the biggest centre on the trade-route along the North-Estonian coast. It was used most intensively in the 9<sup>th</sup> century, when there was a large settlement on top of a hill, defended on three sides by a steep bank of the River Pirita, which forms a U around it.<sup>40</sup> A probable harbour has been located between the slope and the river bank at one end of the natural hill.<sup>41</sup> The early Viking Age fort at Iru had a wall only at one end while the steep slopes lacked strong artificial fortifications, except perhaps for some light wooden fence. The river, on the other hand, is characterised by lots of small ditch-like rivulets near the hill-fort, which could give credence to the story of Frode draining the river by creating numerous new outlets, and thus removing the natural protection of the hill-fort.

From the second half of the 10<sup>th</sup> century it is known that Rāvala, the area around Iru, paid tribute to Novgorod/Gorodishche (see later in this text). It is possible that North-Estonia had even earlier been a tributary area of Rus, which in itself would be reason to include it under the same toponym. Other important hill-forts in North-West Estonia at this time were Padise (in the 13<sup>th</sup> century Padis), also situated near a harbour site, from the 7<sup>th</sup> to the 10<sup>th</sup> century<sup>42</sup>, and Pada (13<sup>th</sup>-century Padagas), which was used from the 6<sup>th</sup> up to the 10<sup>th</sup> or 11<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>43</sup> Whether one of them could have been the Paltisca mentioned by Saxo is however uncertain, and the description of this hill-fort, as of other hill-forts in these stories, did not include specific details that might even hypothetically identify them. It is however quite improbable to identify Paltisca with Palteskja (the Scandinavian name for Polotsk), as Saxo seems to have done, firstly because of the distance from the coast to Polotsk. To reach Polotsk with ships Frode would have taken the Daugava route, whose starting point he attacked only later. However, several old songs or stories here could simply have been put together by Saxo, or some old names translated according to Saxo's knowledge of place-names in the East.

40 Lang 1996: 34–104.

41 Mägi 2007b.

42 Tõnisson 2008: 194–195.

43 Ibid.: 228–229.

The mythological hero Starkadr was, according to Saxo, born in the land bordering Sweden in the East, where 'barbarous hordes of Estonians and other nations now dwell'.<sup>44</sup> Together with the Vendic prince Vin, he undertook Viking raids against the Couronians, Sembians, Semigallians, and other people in the East (*Curetum, Semborum, Samgalorum omniumque postremo Orientalum*), and thereafter in Russia and Byzantium.<sup>45</sup> The ethnonyms chosen by Saxo corresponded at least in his time to the southern half of the Eastern Baltic, a location reinforced by the mention of a Vendic prince. Vends were also connected with the mention of the Semborum, Curetum compluriumque Orientis, when King Jarmerik continued to attack them after he defeated the Vends<sup>46</sup>, that is, the King probably sailed along the southern coast of the Baltic Sea. In connection with this, the mythological king Hellespont appears on the scene again – in fact, Jarmerik fought against four pirate brothers from Hellespont and married their sister, whom he had brutally executed later.<sup>47</sup>

Hellespont was also attacked by Regner Lodbrog.<sup>48</sup> Here Saxo provides an interesting detail that the sons of the Hellespont King Dian were married to daughters of a Russian king, and thus the Hellespont-people (the Livs?) got Russian troops to help as allies.<sup>49</sup> As will be shown later, the Russian principedoms started to be particularly interested in the Daugava route in the 10<sup>th</sup> century, suggesting that the story might have its roots in some narrative depicting this period.

The 10<sup>th</sup> or perhaps the 9<sup>th</sup> century also appears to be the appropriate time for the following events described by Saxo. King Regner decided to attack the Biarmes, who were holding a key position on the trade route towards the East along the River Volga. In the beginning of this campaign, the Bjarma sorcerers bewitched the weather, and forced Regner to sail in the only direction he could – meaning that he landed in the land of the Couronians and the Sembians (*in Curorum Semborumque regionem*).<sup>50</sup> This is a clear hint that the region under question could geographically be the same area. The way to the Biarmes would have meant sailing through the Bay of Finland, and the land he actually reached was probably the Kurzeme peninsula. Saxo, or more likely some earlier author, reports that King

44 Saxo's *Danmarks Historie* 6. 5. 2; 247.

45 Ibid. 6. 5. 14–15, 251–252.

46 Ibid. 8. 10. 6, 366.

47 Ibid. 8. 10. 7ff, 368ff.

48 Regner Lodbrog lived probably in the middle of the 9th century. Whether he actually had anything to do with the story related to us by Saxo is uncertain.

49 Saxo's *Danmarks Historie*: 9. 4. 20–21, 405.

50 Ibid.: 9. 4. 23, 405.

Regner was received there as a victorious warlord<sup>51</sup>, thus hinting at some possibly existing treaty or earlier established status as a tributary land.

### *Archaeological evidence*

When turning to archaeological evidence, it is important to keep in mind that there is a long-lasting tradition in Eastern European archaeology of considering Scandinavian influence as an indication of a somewhat 'higher' culture. G. S. Lebedev's and V. A. Bulkin's works put forward Scandinavian-influenced archaeological finds as a prerequisite for talking of early urban centres.<sup>52</sup> These attitudes have often biased interpretations of archaeological finds, where Scandinavian impact is assumed, and other alternatives excluded.

The period 500–800 AD in the Eastern Baltic, as everywhere in northern Europe, was characterised by the appearance of new centres connected with trade. The most prominent of them in the northern part of the Eastern Baltic was the Iru hill-fort in present-day Tallinn.<sup>53</sup> Just a couple of miles from it several 5<sup>th</sup>–6<sup>th</sup>-century luxury items, probably of South-Scandinavian origin, decorated in the style of Salin I, have been found in an otherwise local stone grave at Proosa.<sup>54</sup> Further south, the 7<sup>th</sup> century witnessed the appearance of a Scandinavian colony at Grobiņa, probably together with a kind of trading place.<sup>55</sup> The latter has, however, not been found.

More hill-forts and trading centres appeared on the scene in the 8<sup>th</sup> century. When Birka on the western coast of the Baltic Sea got its start, Tartu appeared in eastern Estonia<sup>56</sup>, and approximately at the same time, in the middle of the 8<sup>th</sup> century, Staraya Ladoga was established in present-day Russia.<sup>57</sup> Several smaller hill-forts also appeared elsewhere along the Estonian coast.<sup>58</sup>

In the lower reaches of the River Daugava, several hill-forts had already been established in the Bronze Age, Aizkraukle and Daugmale probably being the most prominent of them.<sup>59</sup> Further east along the river, the hill-forts of Koknes and Dignāja, the predecessor of Jersika, should be mentioned, together with several

51 Ibid.: 9. 4. 23, 405.

52 Nosov et al 2005: 18 and references; Jansson 1997: 25 and references.

53 Lang 1996: 34–104.

54 Deemant 1977; 1978.

55 Nerman 1958.

56 Tvauri 2001: 245–246.

57 Ambrosiani & Bäck 2007.

58 Tõnisson 2008.

59 Zemītis 2007; Šnē 2009.

others, which were probably not of the same importance.<sup>60</sup> A settlement in the vicinity of later Polotsk got its start perhaps in the 8<sup>th</sup> century as well, and existed until the 10<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>61</sup>

There were also several Couronian hill-forts with a pre-Viking Period culture<sup>62</sup>, one of them probably Apuole.<sup>63</sup> Couronian hill-forts of both pre-Viking time as well as later centuries, except Grobiņa, are usually situated at least 20 km from the coast<sup>64</sup>, which makes it difficult to see their direct connection with overseas trade routes, although some researchers have tried to claim one.<sup>65</sup> Further south, Truso<sup>66</sup> was established in the estuary of the River Vistula at the end of the 8<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>67</sup>

Vladas Žulkus has reported that the first Scandinavian imports appeared in southern Couronian artefact material as early as the 5<sup>th</sup> century, while the 6<sup>th</sup>–7<sup>th</sup> centuries were characterised by increasing Scandinavian activity. The intensity of Scandinavian influence in Couronia was, however, assessed in comparison with inland Lithuanian areas<sup>68</sup>, and not, for instance, with the northernmost areas on the Eastern Baltic coast. On the other hand, the pre-Viking periods, as well as the first half of the Viking Age of northern Couronia and the lower reaches of the River Daugava are little investigated. The number of sites was probably quite modest there, which can be associated with the general phenomenon of very scanty 7<sup>th</sup>–9<sup>th</sup>-century archaeological finds characterising the southern areas inhabited by Finnic-speaking people, that is, Estonia and northern Latvia.

### *The northern half of the Eastern Baltic*

What may be the most remarkable changes in Eastern Baltic pre-Viking time culture, caused by Scandinavian impact, can be traced to the island of Saaremaa. Of the few excavated Migration Period graves a probable 5<sup>th</sup>–6<sup>th</sup> century burial place at Paju, West Saaremaa, contained several grave goods that were apparently imported from Scandinavia.<sup>69</sup> Excavations in recent years at Salme, a probable harbour site, have brought to light two 8<sup>th</sup> century boat graves with dozens of warriors buried

60 Stubavs 1966; Šnē 2009.

61 Gurevitch 1970.

62 E.g. Zabiela 2008.

63 Lamm et al 2009.

64 E.g. Žulkus 2001; Zabiela 2008.

65 E.g. Žulkus 2001; Žulkus & Mindaugas 2009.

66 Janów-Pomorski.

67 Bogucki 2004; Wróblewski 2006: 111; Žulkus & Mindaugas 2009.

68 Žulkus 2000; 2007.

69 Tamla & Jaanits 1977.





Stone circle graves at Piila, central Saaremaa.



there together with their weapons and some other items.<sup>70</sup> The find is however so unusual that it can most probably be interpreted as a grave of Scandinavian, presumably Central-Swedish men, who had perished during a trip to the East, a view that is reinforced by several violent injuries visible on the skeletons.

The last centuries before the Viking Age witnessed the appearance of a new grave form, emerging more or less simultaneously on Gotland, Saaremaa and probably northern Couronia: cremations in stone circle graves<sup>71</sup> or in round stone barrows.<sup>72</sup> In the two last areas this new grave form indicated a dramatic change in burial customs, from earlier collective burials to individual cremation graves.<sup>73</sup> On the other hand, the 5<sup>th</sup>–6<sup>th</sup>/7<sup>th</sup> century was the last period when the archaeological evidence of Saaremaa predominantly resembled (southern) Couronia. Mutual connections between these areas also persisted later, but after the 7<sup>th</sup>–8<sup>th</sup> century, communication with Scandinavia and especially Gotland became dominant on Saaremaa.

Finds connected with males in Saaremaa graves after the 7<sup>th</sup> century were in most parts literally the same as on Gotland, a phenomenon that characterised Osilian material culture throughout the following centuries.<sup>74</sup> Special local weapon types or male ornaments, such as characterised all ethnic Baltic areas did not develop on Saaremaa or anywhere else in Estonia. Female ornaments retained much more local traits. It should however be mentioned that Finnic Eastern Baltic women also used, together with more specifically female ornaments, the same ornament types as men, of which several were widespread types found in Scandinavia also (e.g. big penannular brooches and some belt fittings).

The 9<sup>th</sup> century saw the appearance of new hill-forts in the Eastern Baltic and North-West Russia, several of which can be considered as ports of trade. In the middle of the century, Rjyurik Gorodishche came up on the northern coast of Lake Ilmen, denoting the growing importance of the Eastern trade along the Volga River. In Northern Estonia the 9<sup>th</sup> century was the time of the largest hill-fort at Iru, which burnt down around 900, and was never re-built on the same scale again. It is likely that such a decline of the Iru hill-fort can be explained by the emergence of a new centre in Gorodishche and the establishment of the Rus state. The Rus leaders, either coming from their centres in later Russia or directly from Sweden,

70 Konsa et al 2009; the finds of 2010 are still unpublished.

71 It should be noted here that the same English term is, in Lithuanian archaeology, used for early and middle Iron Age grave forms in Couronia. It is, however, a different phenomenon.

72 Mägi 2002: 125–128 and references.

73 Mägi 2007a.

74 Ligi 1995; Mägi 2002.

might have been interested in subordinating the North-Estonian coast and first of all Iru. It was inevitable for guaranteeing safe passage.

There are Scandinavian artefacts found at Iru hill-fort, which nevertheless, taking into account the occurrence of northern European or Scandinavian artefacts in Estonian sites in general, have not been considered very specific. First, arrow-heads and some ornaments point in the Scandinavian direction. Among the silver coins found at the hill-fort, there are at least two Kufic coins from the 9<sup>th</sup>–10<sup>th</sup> centuries.<sup>75</sup>

Estonian archaeological evidence from the 8<sup>th</sup> to the mid-10<sup>th</sup> century is generally characterised by a small number of graves and a limited number of artefacts even in the sparse burial places known from this period. This paucity is true both for the mainland of Estonia, where collective cremations in stone graves dominated and for Saaremaa with its sudden appearance of individual graves. This phenomenon can probably be explained by the cultural background, the mythology and concepts of the Afterlife shared by the Baltic Finns, as the same features seem to exist in other Finnic areas, e.g. in northern Couronia and the area of the Livs. As on mainland Estonia, on Saaremaa too the situation changed in the course of the 10<sup>th</sup> century, when more and more artefacts were put in graves.

### *The southern part of the Eastern Baltic*

In the first half of the Viking Age the central part of the Eastern Baltic was still nearly empty of archaeological finds. Although the water route along the River Daugava certainly played a role in the 9<sup>th</sup> century, it apparently did not function as a trade route of great international importance before the end of the 9<sup>th</sup> or even in the beginning of the 10<sup>th</sup> century, when really big centres appeared on the banks of the river.

In the southern Couronian and Prussian areas the 9<sup>th</sup> century was the time of much more remarkable changes. Truso, the most prominent trade centre of the region in the estuary of the River Vistula, appeared in the late 8<sup>th</sup> century. The Scandinavian colony in Grobiņa disappeared in the beginning of the 9<sup>th</sup> century, according to archaeological material, or in the middle of the 9<sup>th</sup> century, if we accept that the Seeburg mentioned in Rimbert's chronicle was actually Grobiņa. A sort of successor to Grobiņa may have been Kaup-Wiskiauten on the peninsula of Samland, where quite a number of Scandinavian graves have been excavated in otherwise very local circumstances. Just as in Grobiņa, no settlement with any

75 Lang 1996: 93–101.

Scandinavian traces, which could be identified as the actual trade centre, has been unearthed in the vicinity of Kaup so far.

Lithuanian archaeologists have demonstrated that the trade through the Couronian Bay, in the southern end of where the Kaup cemetery existed from the early 9<sup>th</sup> to the early 11<sup>th</sup> century, linked Scandinavia and Western-Slavic areas with central Lithuania around the site of the later Kaunas.<sup>76</sup> The Russian archaeologist Kulakov, on the other hand, has recognised the importance of Kaup in its location on the so-called Amber Route from south-eastern Baltic coastal areas along the River Vistula down to southern Europe and Byzantium.<sup>77</sup>

The intensive use of the Amber Route could also explain the location of Grobiņa, which is not very attractive from the point of view of international trade towards the East.<sup>78</sup> No routes start from Grobiņa. If one was sailing from Central Sweden or Gotland bound for the East along the trade route of Daugava, it would be much more convenient to stop in the estuary of the River Venta or altogether on Saaremaa; to visit Grobiņa would just mean a detour of 140–150 km along the straight and dangerous coast of the Kurzeme peninsula. The situation is quite different, if heading from Gotland to the estuary of the River Vistula – then Grobiņa's location provides a good natural harbour for landing on the Couronian coast on the way further south.

Close contacts between Scandinavia and present-day North-East Poland, and from there further towards Byzantium, can be discovered from archaeological evidence even in periods before the Viking Age.<sup>79</sup> Wojtec Wróblewski has pointed out, with a reference to Bert von zur Mühlen, that 9<sup>th</sup> and early 10<sup>th</sup> century Scandinavian artefacts recorded at the estuary of the River Vistula demonstrate connections primarily with Gotland and Central Sweden, while the second half of the 10<sup>th</sup> and the 11<sup>th</sup> century material is more likely of Danish origin.<sup>80</sup> In Truso, which functioned until the early 11<sup>th</sup> century, Scandinavians might have been present; however, in cemeteries in the vicinity where Scandinavian burials have been unearthed, they all belong to women, while male graves demonstrate an entirely local character.<sup>81</sup> The gender aspect of foreigners seems to indicate connections different from a Scandinavian colony for international trade; here, it is more likely that marriages between noble families are involved.

76 Žulkus 2007; Žulkus & Bertašius 2009.

77 Kulakov 1994: 113–123.

78 See also Bogucki 2006.

79 Kaliff 2001.

80 Wróblewski 2006 and references.

81 Ibid.

This phenomenon should be considered together with the fact that Kufic coins found in Truso all belong to the period between 780–830, while later Kufic coins are very rare in all East-Pomerania and Prussia.<sup>82</sup> The number of Kufic coins in Western Russia is, on the other hand, quite modest until the end of the 9<sup>th</sup> century, and the archaeological finds at Birka, too, indicate contacts mainly with western Slavic areas, and not the East, until the 860s.<sup>83</sup> Everything thus points to the old Amber Route along the River Vistula and further south having been the most intensively used long-distance trade route from central Scandinavia to Byzantium until the middle of the 9<sup>th</sup> century, when the area of later Russia was probably politically still so unstable that travelling through it was too dangerous for large-scale international trade.<sup>84</sup> Kufic coins in Truso did probably reach there through Byzantium, a suggestion that is supported by several items in Truso indicating intensive communication with the empire in the south.<sup>85</sup>

Connections between Finno-Ugric speaking peoples from the Baltic Sea to the Volga River basin have been obvious from the first centuries AD onwards<sup>86</sup> but the Scandinavians probably did not participate in it, at least not on a considerable scale, until the Viking Age. North-Estonian coastal areas might especially in the pre-Viking Period have functioned as a sort of bridgehead for the Scandinavians' increasing eastern interests. When the Scandinavians established themselves in present-day North-West Russia in the middle or the second half of the 9<sup>th</sup> century, the route through southern Couronia, Prussia and along the River Vistula lost its former international importance, although it certainly continued to serve the regional trade.

What products attracted Scandinavians to trade in Lithuania and Prussia has raised questions among several researchers, without any of them being able to offer a satisfactory answer.<sup>87</sup> Graves with Scandinavian artefacts continued in the area until the early 11<sup>th</sup> century, and the Scandinavian evidence after that was replaced

82 Ibid.; Bogucki 2007.

83 Ambrosiani & Bäck 2007.

84 The situation is brilliantly illustrated by a story in *Annales Bertiniani*, about envoys sent by the Byzantine Emperor Theophilus to the Holy Roman Emperor Luis the Pious in 839. These men were called Rhos, which is the first mention of this ethnonym in written sources. They sought for a safer way home through present Western Europe, since the way they had taken to Constantinople "led through cruel and barbarous tribes of extreme savagery". Luis the Pious found them to be of the race of Swedes, so the dangerous way under question was probably through the later Russian areas before the formation of the state took place there (Page 1995, 97).

85 Bogucki 2007.

86 E.g. Jansson 2000a; Sindbæk 2005: 240–244; Ambrosiani & Bäck 2007.

87 E.g. Žulkus 1997: 343ff; 2007; Bogucki 2007; Bliujienė 2008.

by items indicating connections with the Russian princedoms in the East.<sup>88</sup> The very modest number of coins, in comparison with other coastal areas around the Baltic Sea, indicates the insignificant role that the south-eastern coast of the Baltic played in Viking Age long-distance international trade after the mid-9<sup>th</sup> century. Scandinavian influence outside Kaup and Truso seems to have been quite modest, and the whole concept of Scandinavian special interest towards the region relies to a great extent on written sources. These, on the other hand, offer no detailed descriptions after the 9<sup>th</sup> century, and the assessment of Scandinavian interest in Prussian and Lithuanian coastal areas is based on the interpretation of place names like Samland and Kurland.

## Eastern Baltic in the second half of the Viking Age (appr. 950–1050)

### *Written sources*

The number of narratives mentioning the Eastern Baltic areas increases from the second half of the 10<sup>th</sup> century, and these stories tend to be somewhat more concrete than the semi-mythical tales depicting the earlier periods.

### *Scandinavian sagas*

Viking raids on the Eastern Baltic, as they have been described in *Njal's Saga*, can probably be dated to the second half of the 10<sup>th</sup> century. It is worth noting that the only Eastern Baltic toponyms mentioned in these stories are *Adalsysla*, *Eysysla* and *Rafala*.<sup>89</sup> The latter probably denotes Rävåla in North-Estonia, with the centre at Iru. Couronia has been colourfully and vividly depicted by Snorri Sturluson in the *Egil's Saga* as one of the targets of Egil's Viking raids.<sup>90</sup> One of the most fascinating stories is that of the later Norwegian King Olaf Trygvasson's childhood in Estonia (*Eistland*) ca 967–973.<sup>91</sup> Most interesting in this narrative, from the point of view of the present subject, is the information that 'the King' of Novgorod had the right to collect taxes in Estonia, and the same Estonian Viking who had imprisoned Olaf was trading in Novgorod.<sup>92</sup> Which part of Estonia was in question unfortunately remains unknown.

<sup>88</sup> Kulakov 1994: 121–123.

<sup>89</sup> *The Story of Burnt Njal*, 30, 119.

<sup>90</sup> *Egil's Saga*, 46.

<sup>91</sup> Enn Tarvel has suggested that perhaps the prince was only imprisoned by Estonian pirates but then sold to some Baltic-speaking people. The opinion is based on personal names that Tarvel finds similar to some Lithuanian words (Tarvel 1994). Considering the non-Scandinavian names appearing in early written sources in general, I do not find Tarvel's suggestion persuasive enough.

<sup>92</sup> *King Olaf Trygvasson's Saga*, 6, 7; *The History of Norway*, 19.



Approximately the same period is covered by the descriptions of Olaf Haraldson's Viking raids on the eastern coasts of the Baltic Sea, given in the *Historia Norwegiae*, which were also undertaken under the protection of Novgorod. The aforementioned Viking had laid waste 'the large and populous island of *Eysysla*', as well as Gotland, Öland (*Eyland*) and 'the country of Kurlanders', so that at least the Baltic islands had to pay 'enormous sums in tribute' during his plundering raids.<sup>93</sup> The tribute, however, was probably addressed to Novgorod or the Rus state.

Sambia and Sembi have been mentioned by Saxo Grammaticus in his description of how Danish king Harald Bluetooth's sons attacked the eastern coast of the Baltic Sea in the third quarter of the 10<sup>th</sup> century. The author describes how the Danes killed local men and married local women, after which they lost contacts with their old homeland. It is not without good reason, adds Saxo, that Sembi consider Danes as their ancestors.<sup>94</sup> Following the archaeological evidence, however, that kind of self-definition would better suit the northern half of the Eastern Baltic, for instance Saaremaa or the Finnic population in Kurzeme, than Samland in Prussia.

In 1008 Saaremaa (*Eysysse*) is mentioned in a somewhat longer story about the Viking raids under the then-13-years-old Olof, later the Norwegian king Olaf the Holy. Here was also described the tax- or actually tribute-collecting – the locals, having first promised to pay, cheated the Norwegians and carried their weapons rather than the tribute to the shore. Olaf was however victorious in the battle that followed.<sup>95</sup>

Quite a different narrative about collecting taxes in Eastern Baltic appears in the story of Ingvar the Traveller, describing the situation in a land called Seimgal (Semigallia? Saaremaa?) in the beginning of the 11<sup>th</sup> century. The inhabitants in Seimgal had not paid taxes for some time, and King Olaf Skötkonung of Sweden therefore sent two messengers, Ingvar and his own son Onund, with three ships, to discuss the matter. Since three of the local chiefs, however, did not agree to pay, the Swedish king sent more troops to fight the revolting chieftains. Ingvar and Onund managed to re-establish status quo, and returned to Sweden with the tribute and lots of booty.<sup>96</sup>

Eastern pirates and the battles against them in the second half of the 11<sup>th</sup> century have been described by Saxo Grammaticus' stories of Knud the Holy of Denmark. In his youth Knud had forced the hazardous pirates 'quite to their knees', and

93 *The History of Norway*, 23.

94 *Saxo Danmarks Historie* 10:5:0, 440–441.

95 *Saga of Olaf Haraldson*, 13.

96 *The Saga of Ingvar the Traveller*, 4.



thereby disposed of both Sembiants(?) and Estonians (*Sembicis atque Estonicis*).<sup>97</sup> When Knud later came to power he continued this fight and 'annihilated' the Couronians', Sembiants' and Estonians' lands (*Curorum, Sembonumque ac Estonum funditus regna*).<sup>98</sup> What areas Knud actually might have attacked, and how far his 'annihilation' reached, however, remains uncertain.

The aforementioned written sources thus indicate that at least parts of present-day Estonia, as well as perhaps some other areas in the Eastern Baltic, were paying taxes to the Prince of Novgorod as early as in the second half of the 10<sup>th</sup> century, during the time when the leaders of the northern Russian princedoms were predominantly still of Scandinavian origin. Also the ones in charge of exacting the taxes seem to have been Scandinavians. These tributary areas might then still cover mainly Estonian coastal regions, that is, the areas which were then and later in the Scandinavians' direct sphere of interest, and linked with international trade routes. It is probably not quite accidental, that Adam of Bremen around 1075 was possibly referring to Estonia ('Aestland') as one of the Swedish 'islands',<sup>99</sup> although several other sources suggest Rus as the more likely tribute-collector.

### *Russian chronicles*

According to the affirmation of the *Russian Primary Chronicle* taxes were paid in the 11<sup>th</sup> century to the Kiev Prince by all surrounding peoples, among others the Estonians, the Lithuanians, the Couronians, the Semgalians (?) and the Livs (*čudi, litva, kors, zingola, liv*).<sup>100</sup> How credible this data is, or how permanent these tax-paying relationships could have been, remains of course in question. At least Couronia is listed as a Swedish tributary land by Adam of Bremen.<sup>101</sup>

As mentioned above, the toponym Rus often appears in earlier sources as an area associated with maritime culture, which differs from its later character as a predominantly inland state. A good example is given by Snorri Sturluson, who relates a story of Earl Eirik's ravaging raids in the East. Probably in 998 he sailed to the dominions of King Valdemar, that is, Novgorodian and Kievan Prince Vladimir, where he plundered and burnt the dwellings everywhere, and laid waste the country.<sup>102</sup> The only place name mentioned is Aldeigiuburg or Staraya Ladoga but one can however presume that the other areas also plundered by the Scandi-

<sup>97</sup> Saxo 11:8.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid. 11:11.

<sup>99</sup> Adam of Bremen, IV:17, 198.

<sup>100</sup> Bonnell 1862: 4.

<sup>101</sup> Adam of Bremen, IV:16, 197–198.

<sup>102</sup> *King Olaf Trygvason's Saga*, 97.

navian Vikings did not lie very far from the coast, in a zone that they could reach with their own ships. It is therefore likely that the Earl actually plundered densely populated areas of the present-day North Estonian coast. This interpretation is indirectly supported later in the narrative, where Earl Eirik, after having finished with Gardaríke, ravaged all Adalsysla and Eysysla, that is, probably Saaremaa and West- or North-West Estonia. The Earl had carried on these looting trips over a period of five summers.

It has been pointed out that the status of the Chudi, normally interpreted as the Estonians, in the Rus state seems to have changed abruptly in the last decades of the 10<sup>th</sup> century, during the rule of Vladimir the Holy (987–1015), or King Valdemar, as he appears in Scandinavian sources.<sup>103</sup> According to the Russian chronicles the Chudi had been present at the foundation of Rus (see above), and they participated in the military campaigns organised by the Russian Princes until the 980s. In 980 they helped the then Novgorodian Prince Vladimir to subdue Polotsk.<sup>104</sup> After that, they were probably helping Vladimir to gain power over the whole of Kiev-Rus. At least 'the best men' of the Chudi, together with the Slavs, were the ones who manned the newly-founded towns after Vladimir's campaign to the South.<sup>105</sup>

The first known attack by the Russian Princes on the territory of present-day Estonia was undertaken in 997, when the same Prince Vladimir the Holy arranged a campaign against the Chudi who had stopped paying tribute.<sup>106</sup> The first raid was followed by several others against the eastern part of Estonia, mainly during the first half of the 11<sup>th</sup> century. Estonian historian Herbert Ligi has suggested the Conversion of Prince Vladimir in 988 as the main reason for it, accordingly considering the campaigns as a sort of crusade against the still pagan Chudi.<sup>107</sup> However, the change in the relationships with the Chudi coincides remarkably with the generally diminishing Scandinavian impact in Rus. The beginning of the 11<sup>th</sup> century is the time when the political system in Old Russia was already steadily established and the now Christian elite of the princedoms was Slavonized.<sup>108</sup>

103 Ligi 1968: 38–46.

104 Ibid.: 40 and references.

105 *Nestors kronike*, year 988 (6496), 105.

106 Bonnell 1862: 2.

107 Ligi 1968: 38–46.

108 The change in Scandinavian-Russian relationships during the reign of Vladimir the Holy has been also pointed out by Russian historians. Before the 11<sup>th</sup> century the connections between these areas were spontaneous, and Scandinavians appeared as one, without big differences in their country of origin. From the last decade of the 10<sup>th</sup> century until late 1010s Scandinavians do not figure in Russian chronicles, and this is generally also the time when their influence in archaeological evidence

One can presume that attacks from the East against the Eastern Baltic areas differed to a certain extent from these described in Scandinavian sources. First of all, the Russian princes assaulted mainly inland areas, not the coasts as was characteristic of the Scandinavians. The targets of campaigns seem, however, to have been largely defined by trade and trade routes, as in preceding periods. Thus in 1030 the Novgorodian and Kievan Prince Jaroslav conquered Tartu, the most important nodal point on the River Emajõgi route in eastern Estonia, and made it his own tax-collecting centre. The next larger-scale campaign was led by his son Izjaslav in 1054, again to eastern Estonia. It suggests that certain areas in eastern Estonia, especially these around Tartu, became Novgorod's tributary areas for some period.

The second half of the 10<sup>th</sup> and the first half of the 11<sup>th</sup> century were characterised by a fierce political struggle between Novgorod and Polotsk. The geopolitical location of Polotsk is relevant particularly in connection with trade. It was situated at the crossroads of two intensively used water routes: along the Daugava River towards the east and along the lakes between Estonia and Russia towards the south. The latter passed through Pskov, an independent principedom within Novgorod's sphere of influence, which suggests that the economic power of Polotsk was dependent predominantly on control over the Daugava route. Although we lack direct data, it can be assumed that the areas in the Daugava basin, inhabited by the Latgallians and the Livs, were as early as in the second half of the 10<sup>th</sup> century already somehow dependent on Polotsk, as is documented a century later. If not, the connection between Polotsk and the Baltic Sea would have been complicated, and the economic and political prosperity of Polotsk hard to explain.

The attempts by Russian principdoms to conquer present-day Estonia intensified in the middle of the 11<sup>th</sup> century. In 1054–1055 Izjaslav, the new Prince of Kiev and Novgorod undertook two campaigns to Estonia, the first of them ending in defeat for the Novgorodians, but the next one apparently victorious. Six years later, in 1060, the same Prince attacked the Sossols (ssoly) and forced them to pay 2000 grivnas per year as a tribute. The Sossols are generally believed to have been inhabitants of some Estonian district, which taking into account the amount of the tribute, must have been a large and wealthy one. They must have been militarily powerful as well, since the Sossols had in 1061 already mounted a counterattack, burnt down the Russian princes' centre in eastern Estonia – the hill-fort and settle-

ceases. The next and last period of intense Scandinavian relationships appeared during the reign of Jaroslav the Wise (1016–1018, 1019–1054), but then the character of the relations had already changed: from now on they could be described as political connections between consolidated states (Melnikova 2007).

ment at Tartu – laid waste the lands around and then attacked Pskov. The united forces of Pskov and Novgorod were able however to prevent the Sossols from burning down Pskov as well.<sup>109</sup>

Several historians believe that the Sossols was a Russian name for the Osilians, derived from the Scandinavian Sysla.<sup>110</sup> That the Sossols were the Osilians or perhaps western or north-western coastal Estonians (*Adalsysla*) seems to be indicated not only by the size of the tribute or their military success, but also by the seasons of the expeditions. Izjaslav attacked in winter, as was common, and for Saaremaa, often even the only option, if the enemy did not have a considerable navy at his disposal. The Sossols, on the contrary, counterattacked in spring, which suggests that they used ships. Since they attacked first Tartu and only thereafter Pskov, they might have moved along the rivers through central Estonia. Control over this route, which in the 11<sup>th</sup> century probably still possessed a certain importance, could have been the main reason why these attacks took place.<sup>111</sup> Novgorod's interest in subordinating the Osilians who controlled sailing routes in the vicinity of their domain was already obvious in the story of Olaf Haraldsson in *Historia Norwegiae* (see above).

In the second half of the 1060s Polotsk first attacked Pskov and after that Novgorod, on the whole still without success. The rest of the 11<sup>th</sup> century was characterized by internal fights between the Princedoms of Polotsk and Novgorod-Kiev, while no more campaigns against the Eastern Baltic areas are known, at least according to the chronicles.

### *Archaeological evidence*

Turning to the archaeological evidence, one of the most remarkable changes characteristic of the period was the abandonment of the trade centre at Birka around the year 975. It was approximately the time when the formerly strongly Scandinavian-dominated trade centres in Rus were reorganised as political centres of the now consolidated Russian princedoms. One of them was Novgorod, where the town came up around the St. Sophia's Church in the end or second half of the 10<sup>th</sup> century, and the earlier hill-fort and settlement at Gorodishche was (for some time) abandoned.<sup>112</sup> The disappearance of Birka signified not only the decreasing Swedish influence in the East and the independence-gaining processes in Rus, but

109 Bonnell 1862: 5; Ligi 1968: 42–43; Tvaari 2001: 226–227.

110 E.g. Ligi 1968: 42–43.

111 Mägi forthcoming.

112 Jansson 1997; 2000a; Nosov 2001.

also the political development inside Sweden. Sigtuna, which replaced Birka, was situated further inland and was to a greater extent connected with domestic trade and developed under royal regulations.<sup>113</sup>

In the Eastern Baltic the old centre of Iru disappeared or at least lost most of its functions around the year 1000.<sup>114</sup> Since Iru had probably been an important point on the trade route along Estonian coast, its disappearance may indicate the same tendencies that on the other side of the sea led to the trade centre moving from Birka to Sigtuna – the decline of the eastern trade. It cannot be accidental that Novgorod as a big centre had come up only a little earlier.

Continuous unity with Scandinavia is, in Estonian and Livic archaeological evidence, best demonstrated by common weapon types, often pattern-welded and decorated in Scandinavian ornament styles. Especially 11<sup>th</sup>-century 'Scandinavian' decorated weapons have been found in much bigger quantities in areas inhabited by Finns, Estonians and Livs than in Scandinavia itself. It does not come as a surprise that this phenomenon characterised predominantly coastal areas; in Estonia primarily Saaremaa.<sup>115</sup> Kristina Creutz's study has proved that at least some of these weapons were also produced locally and not imported from Scandinavia.<sup>116</sup> The distribution of similar weapons in Couronia, Prussia and other areas inhabited by ethnic Balts was considerably more modest.<sup>117</sup>

The last decades of the 10<sup>th</sup> century saw a sudden decrease and then the end of Kufic coins streaming into Europe. Whatever the reasons might have been, it probably also meant less intensive use of the old Viking Age Volga route, which had earlier been the most relevant factor behind the appearance of Gorodishche-Novgorod at its location. Although the fur trade between the northern areas and the Eastern Baltic continued to a certain extent, the most important international trade route from Scandinavia through Russian areas was from then on the one heading to the south, and it seems to have determined the bulk of the internal military conflicts between the Russian princedoms during the following two centuries.

While the northernmost route through the Eastern Baltic areas lost a great part of its importance, the second half of the 10<sup>th</sup> century and the 11<sup>th</sup> century were prosperous times for other routes leading through present-day Estonia and Latvia. Tartu on the river route through Central Estonia flourished in the 10<sup>th</sup> century<sup>118</sup>,

113 See also e.g. Sawyer 1982: 130.

114 Lang 1996: 101–104; Mägi 2007b.

115 Mägi-Lõugas 1994.

116 Creutz 2003: 118–120.

117 Kazakevičius 2002.

118 Tvauri 2001: 245–246.



and was in the first half of the 11<sup>th</sup> century taken over by Novgorodian princes. The same was true for Pskov further on along the same route.<sup>119</sup> Archaeological finds at Tartu, especially ceramics, indicate close similarities with other late Viking Age centres in present-day North-West Russia, especially Pskov and Novgorod.<sup>120</sup> As indicated by archaeological evidence, the significance of Tartu probably ceased in the second half of the 11<sup>th</sup> century, after the Sossols had burnt down the centre controlled by Novgorod.<sup>121</sup>

### *The northern half of the Eastern Baltic*

In the beginning of the other trade routes that controlled the traffic bound for Russian princedoms through the Eastern Baltic rivers, the Estonian islands, particularly Saaremaa, prospered, at least according to the archaeological material. Especially weaponry and other attributes associated with males, continuously demonstrated unity between Saaremaa and Eastern Scandinavia. On the other hand, the 11<sup>th</sup> century also seems to have been the time of changes in burial customs on Saaremaa. Stone circle graves and stone cairns that had been characteristic of the first two centuries of the Viking Age fell gradually out of use in most parts of the islands, and were replaced by stone graves without formal structures. The latter were typical of mainland Estonia and large areas in Finland, and consisted of completely mixed cremation burials together with abundant artefacts. Individuality in burial customs, which had been characteristic of the earlier grave forms in Saaremaa, persisted in parts of these cemeteries, while the rest of the stone graves were now again collective burial places, as they had been before the appearance of Scandinavian-type graves in the pre-Viking period.<sup>122</sup> Although the change was probably predominantly defined by internal changes in Osilian society, it also marked the weakening influence from the Scandinavian side that, at least archaeologically, became especially obvious in the 12<sup>th</sup> century.

Saaremaa itself did have a cultural impact on several of the surrounding areas, primarily on the West-Estonian coast but perhaps also further away – the very East-Scandinavian-like material culture of male Osilians makes it difficult to distinguish them from the warriors of several other areas. However, in some places their presence can be traced by single female attributes or even graves with typically Osilian female ornaments. The latter is especially true for Livic cemeteries in

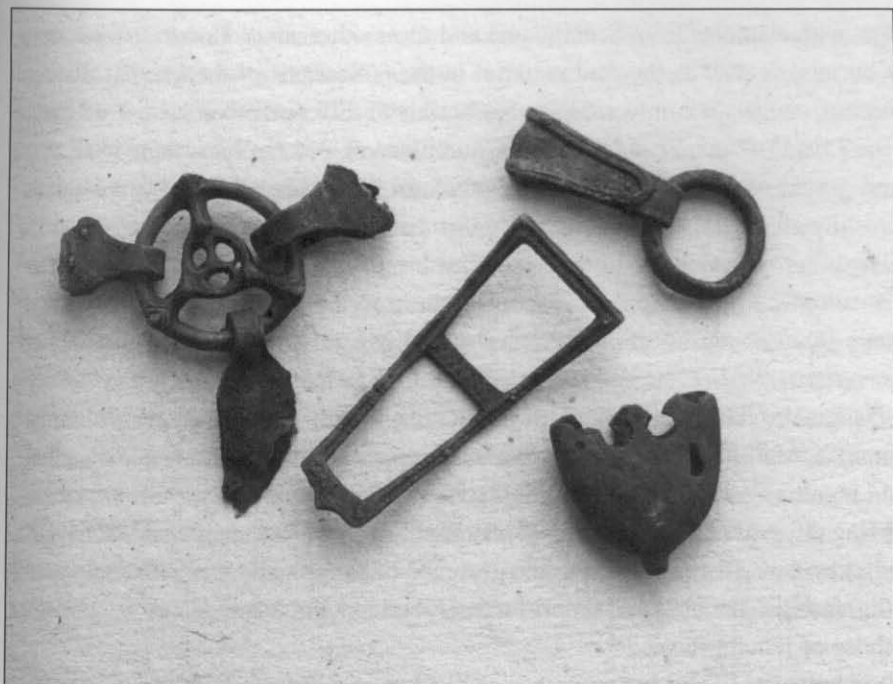
119 Bonnell 1862: 3.

120 Tvauri 2001: 249–250.

121 Ibid.: 246–254.

122 Mägi 2002: 128; 2007a; see also earlier in this text.





Collection of Osilian and/or Gotlandic late Viking Age finds from Viltina, southern Saaremaa.

the estuary of the River Daugava, an area presumably of special interest for the Osilians.<sup>123</sup>

The most important trade route through late Viking Age Eastern Baltic was now clearly the River Daugava, in the estuary of which Daugmale flourished especially during the 11<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>124</sup> Between Daugmale at one end and Polotsk near the other end of the river, other centres also developed, first of all Jersika and Koknes, which later became political centres of petty princedoms dependent on Polotsk.

The lower reaches of the River Daugava experienced a great cultural change in the middle of the 10<sup>th</sup> century when large Livic cemeteries made their appearance.<sup>125</sup> The biggest of them were concentrated around the hill-fort and settlement of Daugmale, and can presumably be considered as the burial places connected with this centre. Latvian archaeologists tend to see these cemeteries as predominantly

<sup>123</sup> Māgi forthcoming.

<sup>124</sup> E.g. Zemītis 2007.

<sup>125</sup> Most Latvian archaeologists explain the sudden appearance of these cemeteries in an area with sparse early Viking Age finds as a large-scale immigration from Couronia. It is however likely that Livic burial customs, as was characteristic also for Estonians, seldom left any archaeologically observable traces before the middle of the 10<sup>th</sup> century.

Livic, with elements from Scandinavia and some other areas. However, reports on the burials, as well as the find material in the collections of the Latvian History Museum, suggest not only artefacts but burials of different ethnicities: in addition to the Livs Osilians, Scandinavians, Couronians or Semigallians there were also some graves of Latgalians and East-Estonians. These are all female graves with ethnically characteristic ornaments.<sup>126</sup>

The ethnic diversity of Livic cemeteries has also been pointed out by Latvian archaeologist Roberts Spigis. According to him, the percentage of undisturbed female inhumations of ethnicity other than Livic in the lower Daugava region cemeteries is 28%–37%, and it is especially high in the cemeteries in the vicinity of Daugmale. The other ethnicities originate mainly from northern Couronia, Saaremaa, Mainland-Estonia, and to a lesser extent from Scandinavia, Semigallia, and Latgallia.<sup>127</sup> The graves of Scandinavian women were traditionally explained as being those of family members of visiting traders, while the others were considered as evidence for migration or the presence of an indigenous population. Some of the 'foreign' female graves, despite their abundant grave goods, were explained as those of female slaves.<sup>128</sup>

It is however likely that a number of male graves in these cemeteries can also be of foreign origin, since male attributes of e.g. Gotlanders, Osilians, Coastal Estonians and Couronians are normally not distinguishable from each other. On the other hand, graves with typical Latgallian or Semigallian weapons or other male attributes seems not to have been recorded in these cemeteries. In particular, a great number of Osilian or Couronian males can be assumed to have been cremated, which was generally not a very widespread rite among the Livs, at least in their other areas of settlement.<sup>129</sup> These specific features give solid evidence, in my view, for regarding the complex of Daugmale hill-fort, settlement, and the ethnically diverse cemeteries surrounding them as a late Viking Age and 12<sup>th</sup> century international colony<sup>130</sup>, which correlates well with the increased importance of the Daugava water route during this period.

Scandinavian burials in Livic cemeteries seem to belong mainly to the 10<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>131</sup> In the 11<sup>th</sup> century the direct Scandinavian influence presumably retreated, but by then features that were originally Scandinavian had become a

126 Mägi 2005; forthcoming.

127 Spigis 2008: 347–375, especially 373.

128 Ibid.: 347–375, 494–495.

129 Šnē 1997: 197.

130 Mägi forthcoming.

131 E.g. Zariņa 2006: 317–320, 424–427; Spigis 2008: 347–375, 492–496.

part of the local culture. It is especially evident in the development of the tortoise brooches that became an ethnic attribute for Livic women.<sup>132</sup> The former strong connections between Sweden and the Russian princedoms, of which the most relevant for the Daugava route is Polotsk, had weakened by the 11<sup>th</sup> century. It may be possible that the estuary of the River Daugava, with the Livs occupying these areas, was at least from time to time a tributary land of the Polotsk Princedom.

In archaeological material the eastern influence on the Livic culture is obvious in their particular decoration style using floral motifs, which began in the second half of the 11<sup>th</sup> century. The Livic floral style differed considerably from the generally geometric jewellery decoration used by other ethnicities in the northern half of the Eastern Baltic, and it also differed from the Scandinavian animal styles that generally were adapted as weapon and belt-fitting decoration by the Finnic-speaking population of the region.<sup>133</sup> The Livic floral style was represented both on the local jewellery and on sword hilts. Predictably, the closest parallels to the floral motives used by the Livs can be found in Kiev-Rus, especially in its southern areas, that is, along the trade route from the Livic lands to Kiev and further south.<sup>134</sup>

### *The southern half of the Eastern Baltic*

In the southern part of the Eastern Baltic, in Couronia and Prussia, the international long-distance trade seems nearly completely to have lost its importance during the final part of the Viking Age. Scandinavian burials in Kaup-Wiskiauten did not last longer than the beginning of the 11<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>135</sup> The trade centre at Truso stopped functioning at the same time<sup>136</sup>, and was during the following century replaced by Gdańsk.<sup>137</sup> The old Amber Route had completely stopped serving international trade.<sup>138</sup> Žulkus has reported Palanga existing as a trade centre up to the 12<sup>th</sup> century, but this site was connected with more regional trade between the Baltic Sea and central Lithuania.<sup>139</sup>

Couronia during this period was characterised by what were probably ethnic Baltic burial customs spreading northwards on the one hand<sup>140</sup>, and the whole culture turning to closer resemblance with Semigallia, the inland Baltic area east

<sup>132</sup> Spigis 2008.

<sup>133</sup> E.g. Tõnisson 1974: 170; Mägi-Lõugas 1994; 1995.

<sup>134</sup> Tõnisson 1974: 70.

<sup>135</sup> Žulkus & Bertašius 2009.

<sup>136</sup> Wróblewski 2006; Bogucki 2007.

<sup>137</sup> Bogucki 2004.

<sup>138</sup> See also Filipowiak 1985.

<sup>139</sup> Žulkus 1997.

<sup>140</sup> Žulkus 1991: 11; 2000.

of Couronia, on the other hand. There were traces of Scandinavian influences in Couronia, especially in the form of single artefacts, but they were quite meagre in comparison with the areas further north.<sup>141</sup> No late Viking Age silver hoards have been recorded in Prussia and Couronia, and the number of Scandinavian artefacts among the local material diminishes considerably towards the end of the period.<sup>142</sup>

## **Eastern Baltic in the 12<sup>th</sup> century**

### *Historical sources*

The changes that had started in the second half of the 11<sup>th</sup> century became especially evident in the 1100s. Political organizations in the countries around the Eastern Baltic had developed, markedly reducing the importance of the plundering economy in these states. The Viking raids that earlier had played an unavoidable role in gaining status for young men of higher social rank were gradually replaced by more centrally organized military expeditions, frequently with the objective of conquering new territories. Random plundering raids undertaken by some particular chieftains became the domain of the Eastern Baltic coastal people.

The 12<sup>th</sup> century was the time when the Russian princedoms developed into individual states, whose dependency on the Great Prince remained only nominal. Furthermore, in 1130 the title of Great Prince was transferred from Kiev to Vladimir, 200 km east of Moscow, which was the centre of the Vladimir-Suzdal Princedom. In 1169 the Prince of Vladimir-Suzdal conquered Kiev and plundered it thoroughly, an event which is considered to be the end of the Kiev-Rus state in historical writing.

1136 is counted as the beginning of the independent Novgorod state, where the veche made decisions and the prince's political power was limited. Pskov was to a certain degree dependent on Novgorod. Polotsk was independent and ruled over the whole Daugava-Western Dvina route, with the petty Princedoms of Jersika and Koknes along it.

The kingdoms in the West were busy with internal fights and military campaigns against their closest neighbours. Several crusades to Finland were undertaken by the Swedish crown, while Denmark was mainly occupied with battles against Norway and the Vends along the southern coast of the Baltic.

141 E g Bliujienė 2008.

142 Bogucki 2007; Bliujienė 2008.

### *Scandinavian sources*

Written sources indicate increasing military activity between the Eastern Baltic and Scandinavia again towards the end of the century. Saxo Grammaticus mentions Estonians' and Couronians' common plundering raid to Blekinge in present-day southern Sweden, then Denmark, in 1170. Henry the Lett contributes several descriptions of the Osilians' and Couronians' Viking-style foraying trips to Scandinavia in the beginning of the 13<sup>th</sup> century and even as late as the 1220s. Several sources have recorded the conquest of Sigtuna in 1187, although they mention different ethnicities, or just 'Eastern men' as responsible for it.

While Sweden organised crusades mainly to Finland, Denmark seems to have been primarily interested in the Eastern Baltic areas, especially those controlling international trade routes. The only known exception is a Danish crusade to Finland in 1191.<sup>143</sup> Henry the Lett mentions a campaign to the Eastern Baltic around 1197<sup>144</sup>, led probably by the Swedish Jarl Birger Brosa. The navy of the Jarl was driven by a violent storm to Vironia in North-Estonia instead, where they plundered for three days but, to the great disappointment of Henry the Chronicler, did not proceed with converting the locals to the Christian faith.<sup>145</sup> It is however difficult to consider this data trustworthy if we interpret Couronia as the southern part of the district, as has been commonly done by several researchers.<sup>146</sup> Danish chronicles mention a campaign to Estonia at approximately the same time, leaving it thus open whether there actually were two campaigns more or less at the same time, or whether the sources are recording a single trip that was connected with both the Swedish and the Danish crown.<sup>147</sup>

It is likely that in the year 1197 the Scandinavians sailed over the Baltic in the vicinity of Gotland, but were forced to turn towards the north-east because of strong winds. In all probability they were originally bound for northern Couronia or perhaps even Saaremaa, if we assume that the inhabitants of Saaremaa might have also been called Curones in earlier times. Henry the Lett describes the event in his chronicle as something that had happened before his arrival in Livonia, and has therefore relied on some other documents or just oral tradition. On the northern coast of Estonia the Scandinavians did not attack the area around (later) Tallinn but continued further east along the north-western Estonian coast. The reasons for this might have been political – for instance the Danish king might have had some

143 Tarvel 1994.

144 Henricus Lettus I: 13.

145 Ibid. I: 3.

146 E.g. Blomkvist 2005a.

147 Blomkvist 2005a; 2005b: 210–214.



sort of contract with Rāvala, as seems to be hinted by the events of 1219 when the Danish navy could in the first instance land at Lindanise without any resistance.<sup>148</sup>

There seems to have existed a special Danish interest in Saaremaa, which was probably connected with the Osilians' activity on sea and their leading role in controlling the trade routes that started from the coast of the Eastern Baltic. Even though it remains unknown whether the campaign in 1179 was originally directed against Saaremaa, the Couronians or Estonia in general, in 1206 and later in 1222 the Danish kings did however undertake serious and well-documented attempts to subdue the Estonian islands.<sup>149</sup> On the other hand, Swedish interests in Estonia had roots reaching back into history, too, and even as late as 1123 Estonia (*Hestia*), together with Finland (*Findia*) were mentioned in *Nomina insularum de regno Sueuorum* as Swedish provinces in the East.<sup>150</sup>

The still pagan Eastern Baltic became the target of a Christian mission starting from the second half of the 12<sup>th</sup> century. An initiating role in this seems to have belonged to the Danish state, although some researchers have also emphasised the interests of the Swedish crown.<sup>151</sup> Full-scale crusades to these areas only began in the early 13<sup>th</sup> century, and were carried out mainly by the Germans and the Danes. As in earlier centuries, the crusades were in the first instance also concentrated in the northern half of the Eastern Baltic, suggesting that international trade was still playing an essential role in this choice. However, more spiritual reasons like the need to spread the true faith cannot be excluded as motivating forces for these campaigns.

### *Russian sources*

Military conflicts between the Estonians and the Principedoms of Novgorod and Pskov, and sometimes also Polotsk, which had begun around the year 1000, continued during the 12<sup>th</sup> century. It has been pointed out that the campaigns described in chronicles seem to group into some certain periods, which may indicate a more enduring political interest towards these territories than just collecting a tribute.<sup>152</sup> The attacks seem to originate from both sides, and to be from time to time victorious both for the Estonians and the Russians. Except for some short periods – as in 1134, when Prince Vsevolod once again conquered Tartu – it is

148 Mägi forthcoming.

149 Ibid.

150 Blomkvist 2005b: 577–578 and references; 2009.

151 Blomkvist 2009.

152 Ligi 1968: 38–46.

therefore difficult to see 12<sup>th</sup>-century East Estonia as a tributary territory for the Russian princedoms.

Very few military expeditions against the area of present-day Latvia have been mentioned in Russian chronicles. One reason might be that Polotsk, which geographically could have been the most active princedom in the Latvian direction, lacked its own chronicle-writing tradition, or at least no chronicles from this princedom have survived. The possible campaigns might therefore simply not have been described in written sources, although they were perhaps as frequent as against Estonia.<sup>153</sup>

However, peoples from the area of present-day Latvia have been mentioned as members of Polotsk military troops in several actions in the 12<sup>th</sup> century. In 1106 Polotsk tried to subdue the Semigallians, but without success. Chronicles mention Novgorodian campaigns in 1111 and 1180 against Očela, which is often interpreted as the district of Adzele in north-eastern Latvia. On the other hand, Enn Tarvel has quite convincingly suggested that Očela might have been some district on the North-Estonian coast instead, since the Russians, at least in 1180, fought against the Chudi, who escaped to the sea shore.<sup>154</sup> In 1200 Novgorod attacked Latgale.<sup>155</sup>

According to Henry the Lett the Latgallians in Tālava in northern Latvia and the Livs in Lower-Daugava paid taxes to the Russian princedoms at least towards the end of the 12<sup>th</sup> or the beginning of the 13<sup>th</sup> century. In addition to these areas there were the Princedoms of Jersika and Koknes at the River Daugava, inhabited by the Latgalians. Although Henry the Lett considered these areas as a part of Russia, the interpretation of the political situation in these Princedoms is very much dependent on the researcher's ethnic background. It is however without question that these petty princedoms possessed some sort of political dependency on Polotsk, and were probably ruled by Slavic or semi-Slavic leaders.<sup>156</sup>

The Livs seem to have paid taxes only to Polotsk, and not have been dependent on Jersika or Koknes, which were situated geographically closer to them. Around 1184, when Bishop Meinhard, after he had arrived in the estuary of the River Daugava, wanted to start his mission and build a church in Yxkyl, he asked the Prince of Polotsk permission. The Livs, who inhabited these areas, were thus the subjects of the aforementioned Prince. The permission was granted and the Prince even sent presents to show his support.<sup>157</sup>

153 Selart 2002: 56–67.

154 Tarvel 1975; see also Selart 2002: 59.

155 Selart 2002: 59.

156 Ibid.: 59–67.

157 Henricus Lettus I: 3; see also Selart 2002: 72.

### *Archaeological evidence*

From the archaeological source material it is known that the trade centre at Daugmale in the lower reaches of the River Daugava went out of use in the course of the 12<sup>th</sup> century, while a new centre appeared closer to the river mouth at the site of medieval Riga. By the end of the century, at the latest, Riga had replaced Daugmale completely, a change which was confirmed by the foundation of the medieval town of Riga by the Germans in 1201.<sup>158</sup>

A similar development characterised Rāvala on the North Estonian coast. Iru was certainly abandoned by the beginning of the 12<sup>th</sup> century, but in the course of the same century another hill-fort with a trading place appeared at the site of medieval Tallinn. In 1219, then called Lindanise, it was taken over by the Danes, and a few decades later Reval was established as a medieval town.

Archaeological material in Estonian 12<sup>th</sup> century graves or other sites includes some imported artefacts from both Scandinavia and Russia, while the latter is definitely represented more in the eastern districts. The overall tendency in the artefact material of the country seems to be a sort of generalization of artefact types. It was now true for Saaremaa as well, where the 12<sup>th</sup>-century burial rites, too, became almost entirely similar to those of mainland Estonia.<sup>159</sup> The whole area remained pagan, however, with cremation in stone graves as the dominating burial rite, although the inhumation cemeteries that gradually spread from the eastern part of the country towards the west can be explained by the proximity of Christianised Russian princedoms.<sup>160</sup>

Several artefact types, especially jewellery, in 12<sup>th</sup>-century Estonia were also common to the Novgorod area.<sup>161</sup> In general, the local culture was now influenced by North-West Russian areas to about the same extent as it earlier had been affected by the Scandinavian impact. However, the influence seems to have been different, since now it embraced females perhaps even more than males, while the Scandinavian impact had been predominantly evident in male attributes. It cannot be excluded that the similarities in female decoration may have reflected primarily similar fashions among Finnic-speaking people in North-West Russia and in the territory of present-day Estonia. The influences were not one-sided, but mutual, and artefacts of Estonian origin have been recorded at North-West Russian archaeological sites as well.<sup>162</sup>

158 Zemītis 2007.

159 Mägi 2002: 128, 142–146.

160 Selirand 1974: 178–190; Mägi 2004.

161 Selirand 1974: 202–203.

162 E.g. Selirand 1974: 203; Khvoshchinskaya 2004.

Somewhat similar tendencies characterised Latvian archaeological material, although it was not enough to enable local archaeologists to interpret certain areas in Latgallia as parts of the Russian princedoms. Latgallian graves that have been excavated in numerous cemeteries bore very specific ethnic features separating them from burial grounds in neighbouring areas. This ethnic homogeneity continued throughout the whole period of the Viking Age up to the 13<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>163</sup> The same is true for the Semigallians, who seem to have kept their ethnically distinctive culture throughout the 12<sup>th</sup> century. Although some attacks against them have been recorded in written sources, they left very few archaeological traces – the evidence of both eastern and Scandinavian influence in Semigallia is weak.<sup>164</sup> The 12<sup>th</sup> century in this area, however, witnessed the consolidation of power, as is indicated by large and strongly fortified hill-forts with surrounding settlements. Among these, the complexes Mežotne and Tērvete should be singled out.<sup>165</sup>

12<sup>th</sup>-century Livic cemeteries demonstrated strong local culture with specific features in artefact material. The considerable ethnic diversity in the lower Daugava area which had characterised the 11<sup>th</sup> century markedly declined, probably following the reduced importance of the Daugava route and gradual abandonment of the Daugmale trade centre. The number of coins found in this area had already started to diminish in the 1070s-80s, and the centre fell out of use in the first half of the 12<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>166</sup>

The political dependency on Polotsk, as is known from written sources, can be followed archaeologically in the continuous use of Livic floral decoration, which by the 12<sup>th</sup> century had turned into an authentic part of the Livic culture. Somewhat more obvious proof of connections between the Princes of Polotsk and the upper strata of the Livs is the so-called pendant of Ryjurikovitch, perhaps a status symbol mainly in Livic female graves with the same iconography as was used by the ruling family of Polotsk. Although these pendants in graves date mainly to the 12<sup>th</sup>–13<sup>th</sup> centuries, the earliest of them have been found at some Livic hill-forts and may perhaps belong even to the end of the 11<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>167</sup>

163 Radinš 1999.

164 Banytė-Rowell & Buža 2005.

165 E.g. Jarockis 2001.

166 Spigis 2008: 492.

167 Mugurēvičs 1994.

## At the turn of the 12<sup>th</sup> and the 13<sup>th</sup> centuries

Despite some references in written sources there is insufficient evidence to consider 12<sup>th</sup>-century coastal Estonia, Saaremaa or Couronia as tributary lands of some surrounding political power. Neither concrete narratives nor archaeological material indicates it. The situation was different in Eastern Baltic inland areas, where at least some districts were presumably dependent on the Russian princedoms. The era had changed, and surrounding states' political interests in the Eastern Baltic were not any more determined predominantly by international trade, although it never lost its important role.

Probably the last attempts to create a sort of tributary dependency in the Eastern Baltic were connected with Saaremaa. Such a desire can be seen behind Valdemar II's expeditions to the Estonian islands in 1206 and 1222 descriptions of which seem to be questionable and tendentious in many aspects. It is, however, likely that the Danish crown was proposing a kind of light dependency, probably including mainly taxation and alliance, as well as mutual safety for maritime traffic.<sup>168</sup>

The Danes failed in Saaremaa, but the united forces of the Order of the Brethren of the Sword, the Bishopric of Riga and the Town of Riga were more successful in 1227. The situation that was then established was very similar to the old Viking Age tributary-land dependency. The conquerors got the right to send their representatives to the islands once a year, and the most important result of the whole campaign was, together with the forced conversion of the Osilians, the tribute collected from Saaremaa. The Osilians agreed to support the Order and the Bishops in their military actions, and gave hostages to guarantee the treaty. Such dependency, already out-of-date by the beginning of the 13<sup>th</sup> century, did not last long however, and was by the end of the 13<sup>th</sup> century replaced by a political and economic system resembling surrounding areas in the same period.

## Conclusions

The comparison of written sources mentioning the Viking Age or 12<sup>th</sup>-century Eastern Baltic lands with archaeological evidence in these areas has highlighted some discrepancies, especially concerning the earlier centuries of the period. While archaeology demonstrates much closer contacts with Scandinavia in the northern half of the Eastern Baltic, the written documents on the same subject seem to underline the importance of the southern coast of the Eastern Baltic region in particular.

<sup>168</sup> Mägi forthcoming.



The interpretation of the scanty Viking Age written sources depends however a great deal on the particular researcher's points of view, as well as on the explanation of toponyms, whose concrete meaning seems to have changed often in the course of time.

Both the Scandinavian impact in archaeological evidence and the presumed Scandinavian tributary lands in the Eastern Baltic were apparently defined by international long-distance trade routes, the importance of which varied in different periods. In the 7<sup>th</sup>–8<sup>th</sup> centuries and the very beginning of the Viking Age, when the most intensively used way was the old Amber Route, beginning from the south-eastern shore of the Baltic Sea and leading to southern Europe and Byzantium, Scandinavian interest was concentrated mainly on the southern coast of the Eastern Baltic. In the Viking Age the trade routes through present-day Russia flourished, along the River Volga towards the East, and 'the way from the Varangians to the Greeks'. These routes led through the areas of present-day Estonia and Latvia, that is, the northern half of the Eastern Baltic. It is hardly accidental that the period was archaeologically characterised by enormous Scandinavian influence especially in these areas. Certain districts, e.g. the North-Estonian coast, probably functioned as tributary lands, dependent on either Sweden or the semi-Scandinavian Rus.

When the direct Scandinavian influence came to an end in Kiev-Rus during the last decades of the 10<sup>th</sup> century, this change could also be observed in the archaeological material of the Eastern Baltic areas, where the Scandinavian impact gradually decreased in the course of the 11<sup>th</sup> century. It was at the same time that the route along the River Daugava became the most essential among the internationally important trade routes through the region. This meant, however, that the areas along the River Daugava fell into taxation-dependency of the Polotsk Principdom, and not of some Scandinavian area any more. At the same time the military expeditions initiated by the northern princedoms of Kiev-Rus to present-day East Estonia became more intensive, and starting from the 12<sup>th</sup> century at the latest it is possible to talk of attempts to conquer new territories rather than simply attempt to force the Estonians to pay tribute.

By the 12<sup>th</sup> century the states around the Eastern Baltic were politically consolidated, and this, starting from the end of the century, generated (re)intensified military actions against the Eastern Baltic areas. Nevertheless, the full clash followed only in the beginning of the 13<sup>th</sup> century, and resulted in the incorporation of present-day Estonia and Latvia into Europe, which was carried out mainly by German and Danish forces. Despite several attempts in the following centuries Russia was only able to get a foothold again in these areas 500 years later.

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## The 'skanland'

As indicated the Gotlanders were potentially independent from the King of Sweden since there was a tributary tie between them, *Guta Saga* (12th century version is the 1270s) reports:

1. *Saga* 1949: 34.

2. *Saga* 1949: 147.

Steinar Imsen (ed.)

# Taxes, tributes and tributary lands in the making of the Scandinavian kingdoms in the Middle Ages

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Coat of arms of King Hákon VI Magnusson '*dye coninc van noorwegen*' in *Gelre's Wapenboeck* (probably from the 1350s). (*Norske Konge-Sigiller og andre fyrstesigiller fra Middelalderen*, v. Chr. Brinkmann, Kristiania 1924: 41). Hákon (born 1340) was officially proclaimed King of Norway in 1344, and ruled from 1355/58 to 1380.

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