On One Type of Baltic Sword of the Viking Period

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Over a long period of time, Baltic swords were subject to significant changes. They underwent a long process of development from simple single-edged swords shaped like a huge knife with a wooden hilt to double-edged patterned steel specimens with luxurious hilts, inlaid with non-ferrous and precious metals. Being a prestige weapon, the sword was subject to continuous refinement and it was in the production of swords that technological innovations and artistic achievements of weaponsmiths were first manifested. Swords therefore constitute a perfect reflection of the general tendencies of the development of arms of the Late Iron Age and contribute to a better understanding thereof.

In contrast with other arms of close combat, the sword served not merely as a weapon for close combat from the earliest times to Late Middle Ages, but also as a symbol of power and domination. It is due to this reason that in the Baltic lands swords are usually found in the burials of rich individuals as well as chiefs and warriors distinguished in action. They are not frequent finds in cemeteries, and are seldom encountered in hoards, hillforts and settlements. The presence of swords in graves was governed by the beliefs, religious perceptions and traditions of the European tribes and nations. The Balts followed these traditions as well.

Baltic weaponsmiths also made a significant contribution to the development of European swords which is revealed in sword types produced in the Baltic lands as well as their hilt decorations.

Modern archaeological research shows that the most widespread sword types in the eastern Baltic, e.g. anternal, T and Z (according to J. Petersen's classification) were local products, i.e. they represent an invention of local armourers. As a matter of fact, local armourers also manufactured other sword-types. The latter, though, were widespread all over Europe, while Baltic weaponsmiths took over their hilt forms and successfully manufactured these swords to satisfy local needs. Such sword-types as H, X, Y and M were also well known to the Baltic warriors (Kazakevičius V., 1996).

The present article surveys one of the sword-types which reflects the invention of Baltic armourers, and reviews its origin, distribution and chronology.

Sword characterization and the Question of Terminology. These swords are characterized by five- or even seven-lobed pommels and narrow, straight or slightly down-turned bronze cross-bars (Fig. 1). The swords are 92-93.5 cm
long, with double-edged blades, 4 to 5.7 cm wide and usually narrower than the "classical" blades of various types widespread in Europe. They are lighter and have narrow blades.

The decoration of hilt pommels and cross-bars is unique, tracing back to local traditions and is common not only in decorations of weapons but also on ornaments. The decoration of this sword-type can be divided into 2 groups: the first group has circles with small crosses inside (Fig. 2). In some cases, one of the cross-bars bears no decoration, e.g. the upper hilt cross-bar on the sword from Žašinas, Šilalė District, or the lower hilt cross-bar on the sword from Gurkovičiai, Vileika region, Belorussia (Fig. 3). In rare cases the decoration motifs are different. A well-known sword from Apoolė, Skaudas District, for instance, had a decoration of rows of small rhombuses (Fig. 4a), while the sword from the Talsu Vilzumūčia lake, Talsu District, had a hilt cross-bar decorated with double eyes (Šturm 1936, fig. 3.c). A different decoration was found on sword hilts from Užava Sūmaličiems, Verspils District and Andulai, Kretinė District, cremation burial No. 18. The cross-bars of these swords are decorated with rows of double meandering lines (Šturm 1936, fig. 4.a). In addition to that, the pommel of Andulai sword had a zoomorphic decoration resembling the features of a human face or an animal snout (Fig. 5). Parallel decorations have been found on pommels of swords from Užava Sūmaličiems (Šturm 1936, fig. 4.a, c) and Kandava, Tukums District (Šturm 1936, fig. 7.b). More diversities are visible on a cross-bar detail from Kazdanga, and a well-preserved hilt cross-bar of a sword from the Plitvice Pasilicems cemetery, found during excavations in 1895 by Vladimir Sizov. The central part of the five-lobed pommel of the latter was decorated with two figure-eight shaped plaits on the sides, the upper cross-bar was straight and had a characteristic motif of incised crosses. The lower cross-bar resembles a truncated pyramid the ends of the base of which have stylized heads of birds with eyes perforations. The decoration is specific: it suggests an imitation of the plated pattern with inserted motifs of the above mentioned Curonian decoration. There are swords, hilt cross-bars of which have no decorations whatsoever. These swords include a chance find from Alsungas Kalnini, Kuldiga District (Šturm 1936, fig. 5.a), the cemetery of Pavinytė-Gudai, Akmenė District, grave 65 (Fig. 6) and Kuno (former Dollkeim, Kr. Fischhausen), Zelenogradsk District (Mühlten 1975, table 13:2). A sword cross-bar found by chance in Zemaitiškė Kalvarija had a decoration on only one side of the cross-bar (Fig. 7). Special notice should be made of lower hilt cross-bars which terminate with stylized bird heads with eyes. Such cross-bars belong to swords from Kazdanga Roni, Liepāja District, Ranku Kapanieki, Kuldiga District, Ivande (Lielvande), Kuldiga District and Žašinas, Šilalė District.
Different names are given to swords of this type in archaeological studies. In his description of swords found on the Latvian coastline, for example, the famous Latvian archaeologist Eduards Šturs calls them “Curonian” (Šturs 1936, p. 108-112, fig. 3-5). A study prepared by a German archaeologist Bernt von zur Mühlen before the war and published only in 1975, labels these weapons as Curalandian swords (Kuriändische Schwertform) (Mühlen B., 1975, p. 36). This name, however, did not gain a general acceptance and a Russian archaeologist Anatoly Kirpichnikov attributed the same sword-type to type-I, a name that he himself invented (Kirpichnikov A.H. 1966, p. 53, 84). His lead was followed by an Estonian weapons-researcher Mali Mandel (Mandel M. 1991, p. 120). R.Volkaitė-Kuliskauskienė did not single them out into a separate type at all and placed them in type-T (Volkaitė-Kuliskauskienė R. 1964, p.). I believe that these swords should retain the Curonian (Kurische) name put forward by E.Šturs which would help to avoid misunderstandings in calling the same sword-type by different names.

Investigations of the origin and development of these swords inevitably lead to the consideration of type-T swords, which are doubtless genetically related to the latter. Type-T swords represent one of the most frequent forms over the eastern Baltic in the 9th-12th centuries (Jakobson M. 1992, map p. 226; Kazakevičius V. 1996, p. 44-53, fig. 43). These were products of Baltic weaponsmiths which were renowned not only in eastern Europe, but also reached northern Europe when, were accepted and competed with the popular swords of types M, X, Y and S.

**Distribution, Chronology and Origin**

Data on 64 swords of the Curonian type or parts thereof, which come from 40 find places in eastern Europe, are presently available (Fig. 8). These include 23 intact swords while other have survived only as blade fragments, hilt pommels, cross-bars or their scorched pieces.

The majority of swords of the Curonian type have been found along the coastline of Latvia and Lithuania which was the territory of the Curonian tribe. They have the following geographical distribution: 26 come from Latvia, 20 have been found in Lithuania, 3 in what was formerly East Prussia (now the Kaliningrad Region, of the Russian Federation) and 3 in Belorussia. Thus a total of 52 Curonian-type swords are known in Baltic territory. The largest number of swords or their parts found at a single cemetery, comes from the burial ground of Piltene Pasilicems, Ventspils District, where five swords of this type were found. Four swords were retrieved from the bottom of lake Talso Vilkumuižas. The great majority of swords were found in cemeteries. Only one sword pommel comes from the Mežuotnė hillfort in Bauskas District. In Lithuania, swords of this type have been found in cemeteries as well. During the recent years, just after the burial ground of Varsėdžiai II was found in Šiauliai District, the collection of swords of this type was complemented by fragments of 2 swords and 4 hilt pommels (Dakans B., Škiemis A., 1994, p. 147, fig. 14) (Fig. 9). Two five-lobed pommels from swords of this type have been found at the Griežė cemetery, Mažeikiai District. Two Curonian-type swords excavated at the burial ground of Dolikė, Krūmaučiai Street, 1994 have five-lobed pommels (Mühlen B., 1975, table 13:1,2).

Two swords of this type have been found in Belorussia, at Gurkoviči, Vileika parish (Fig. 3), one of which is intact, while the other survives only as a pommel and the lower hilt cross-bar. Both are preserved in the Lithuanian National Museum in Vilnius.

These swords can be dated by reference to a sword from the burial ground of Pavinytė-Gudai, Akmenė District, cremation grave 65, which was found along with a helmet, harpoon, adze, pennanular brooch, with multangular knobs, 2 cruciform pins, a knife and a bronze string (Fig. 10). The sword is dated to the 11th century.
A unique sword with a seven-lobed pommel, a straight upper and downturned lower hilt cross-bar, decorated with crosses in circles, as is characteristic of the Curonians, was found by chance in Žasinas (fig. 4b). The ends of the lower cross-bar are turned up and resemble bird heads with cavities for the eyes (Vaitkuskinė L. 1981, table LXXIII). Analogous and similar pieces of sword cross-bars have been found both in Lithuania and Latvia, Curonia, e.g. a stray find from the burial ground of Ranku Kopeniekis, Kuldiga District (Šturms E., 1988, fig. 7:1). A close parallel is a cross-bar piece from Ievandie (Liepāja). Finds which show more differences include a cross-bar piece from Kozdanga, Liepāja District, as well as a cross-bar of a well preserved sword found by Vladimir Szov at the burial ground of Piltienes Pasiliciems in 1895. The latter had a five-lobed pommel, the sides of the central part of which were decorated with two figure eight plaits, while the upper pommel was straight and had a characteristic decoration of oblique crosses in circles. The profile of the lower cross-bar resembles a truncated pyramid decorated with stylized bird heads with cavities for eyes at its base. The decoration is exceptional. It implies an imitation of a foreign plaited pattern with insertions of the Curonian motif described above and, according to E.Šturms, testifies to the local origin of the weapon (Šturms E., p. 114).

A further set of grave goods which contributes to the dating of Curonian-type swords was found at the burial ground of Durbē Dīri, Liepāja District, at multiple burial pit II, cremation grave 3. It yielded a sword folded and broken for ritual purposes and a bronze chape, as well as a folded scythe, two scorched and disfigured stirrups, a spur, type-M (according to J.Petersen) battle axe and a spearhead with a triangular blade. The grave is dated to the 13th century (Steipinis P., 1987, p. 16).

Swords of this type are seldom found outside the territories inhabited by the Balts. The closest parallel comes from a Liv cemetery in Krimulda, Riga District,
Latvia. The ends of the lower cross-bar of a sword which was found there had holes with two rings threaded in, the purpose of which remains unclear (RK 1896, p. 77, table 24:2). A Curonian-type sword was fished out of the Odra river between Goclow and Szczecin in Poland (Sarnowska, 1955, p. 318-319). The author correctly notes that this sword was manufactured in the eastern Baltic. Another cross-bar of a sword of this type was published by B.Posta (Sarnowska, 1995, p. 318). Four swords of the type have been found in the Ukraine. It is of interest to note that three of them come from the cultural layer of hillforts. These include swords from Gorodischche and Verbiçkana (both in Chmelnitsk region) as well as Krily, Stanislavsk region. The circumstances surrounding the find of one more sword from the former Poltava province in the Ukraine, are not known. All these swords are dated to the 12th - 13th centuries (Kirpichnikov, 1966, p. 53, 84). One sword also comes from Manulovo, Leningrad region, Russia and one from Rabavere, Parnawa District, Estonia (Mandel, 1991, p. 120, table XI:1). Other finds which can be doubtlessly attributed to this sword-type include hilt cross-bars and a pommel found at Paju, Kogula and Viltina (all in Kuressaare District, Estonia) and Raasiku, Harju District, Estonia (Mandel, 1991, table XII:3, 4, 9. 10).

Fig. 11. Inscription on the blade of a sword found by chance at the burial ground of Pavinête-Gudal, Akmenë District

On the basis of the close and direct connection between type-T and Curonian-type swords as well as their distribution over the Baltic lands, we must deduce that swords of the Curonian type were manufactured by Baltic weaponsmiths, with production centres located in the territory of the Curonian tribes on the eastern coast of the Baltic Sea. In some cases they were produced, using imported blades with bore inscriptions. On the basis of grave goods, the Curonian-type swords, found in the territory of the Balts, should be attributed to the 11th-13th centuries. The development of these swords is a vivid manifestation of the skill of Baltic weaponsmiths and their indefatigable endeavours to perfect their art.

Inscriptions on Sword Blades

Four blades of swords of the type bear inscriptions and marks. A chance find of a sword blade from Alsungas Kalnini, Kuldīgas District, has traces of an illegible inscription. A fragment of an obscure inscription framed within a double cross was found on a sword blade from the Pileties Pasilciems cemetery. Both sides of the blade have engravings of an analogous inscription, the letters of both sides coincide. This is quite an unusual case in the history of weaponry (Kirpichnikov 1966, p. 284, fig. 13:9, 15:1). Another sword with an inscription of non-ferrous metal was fished out from the bottom of the Talsu Vilkmuizas lake. Aleksis Anteins deciphered the inscription as DICTVS + and dated it to the 13th-14th century (Anteins A., 1964, p. 83, 84). His assessment was supported by Donat Drbohlov, who attributed the said sword to the last quarter of the 13th century or the first half of the 14th century (Drbohlov D. A., 1984, p. 89, 90).
I would like to present a more comprehensive analysis of the inscription of a sword blade found accidentally at the cemetery of Pavīvyte-Gudai. The sword is especially well-preserved, 92 cm long, with a double-edged blade 4.7 cm wide and a lower hilt cross-bar 9 cm long and 1.5 cm wide. The cross-bar is decorated with a pattern characteristic of these swords, i.e. crosses in circles. Neither the pommel nor the upper cross-bar have been preserved. The inscription on one side of the blade consists of a Maltese cross, with its arms terminating in small "V" shaped caps. The Latin letters HGEROHRSNĐERN (Fig. 11) were engraved on the cross towards the tip. The inscription does not end in letter N, but is illegible beyond this. The other side of the blade has an engraving of an identical cross and a very similar inscription. Only letters HRNG and traces of some others can be discerned. Albertas Lisanka has dated the sword to the 10th-12th century (Lisanka A., 1975, p. 186-187, fig. 29). Investigating this inscription, D.Đrboglaj read it as follows: N(omine) re(damptoris) n(ostri) a(īptē) o(mēge), N(omine) r(e)g(is) s(avatoris). N(omine) c(ē) e(ternis) r(e)g(is), tēr(ē) n(omi- ne). (In the name of our Redeemer, the alpha and the omega. In the name of the King, the Saviour. In the name of the thrice eternal Lord) + HERENAOHRUSND- ūERIN + (Đrboglaj D.A. 1964, p. 77-78). On the basis of the palaeographical analysis of the inscription, he dates the sword to the end of the 12th century or beginning of the 13th century. A number of other finds, which came to the museum together with the sword, i.e. a bronze penannular brooch with thickened terminals, one haf- ted harpoon-type, and one sash-like spearhead, 2 spearheads with narrow blades and pronounced midribs, and an axe with a wide blade and a blunt end show that the weapon must be attributed to no later than the 12th century. The blade of the Pavīvyte-Gudai sword is doubtless imported, brought in from western Eu- rope, whereas the hilt was manufactured and attached locally.

Conclusions

1. Swords which have different classifications in archaeological studies repre- sent a product of Curonian weapon smiths and should be referred to as the "Curonian-type".
2. The genesis of these swords is closely associated with type-T swords (accord- ing to J.Petersen), from which they actually developed.
3. Curonian swords were in use in the 11th - 13th centuries and reflect the crafts- manship and artistic skills of Baltic weapon smiths, who had mastered the production of weapons perfectly.

Catalogue of Swords

1. (1) - Alusangas Kauni, Kuldiga District, stray find. LVM, V 4156. 85.2 long, width of the blade 4.5 cm. The blade has traces of an inscription. Dated to the 11th century. References: Štūma E., 1936, fig. 5a

2. (2) - Alusangas Kauni, Kuldiga District, grave 32. LVM a11734:29. Scorched pieces of the cross-bar preserved. Dated to the 11th century.
3. (3) - Andužiai, Kretinga District, grave 18. KKK. Preserved pieces, the blade is 5 cm wide. Dated to the 11th century.
4. (4) - Apuolė, Skuodas District, stray find. Lost during World War II. Dated to the 11th century.
5. (5) - Durbes Dūri, Liepāja District, grave 3 at fireplace II. The Liepāja Museum, No. 13139. 96cm long, blade 4.8 cm wide. Dated to the 11th-12th century.
References: Stepnis P., 1967, fig. 7.
6. (6) - Gintaliskė, Plungė District, stray find. ZAM 22582. Preserved as piece of the pommel. Dated to the 9th-12th century.
8. Gintaliskė, Plungė District, stray find. ZAM 22631. Two pieces of the cross-bar preserved.
11. (8) - Griežė, Mažeikiai District, stray find. LNM, AR 185: 718. Preserved pommel. Dated to the 11th - 12th century.
13. (9) - Gurkovichi, Vileika area, Belarusia. LNM, AR 249:39. 44. 2 pieces preserved, 91.9 cm long, the blade 4.3 cm wide. Dated to the 11th century.
References: Antoniewicz W., 1930, fig. 16; Kirplonikov A.N. 1968, p. 84, 85.
17. (12) - Kandava, Tukums District, stray find. JNM-KPM 179-180. Preserved as pommel and both cross-bars. Dated to the 11th-12th century.
18. (13) - Kazdagas Roši (Razdininkai), Liepāja District, LVM 13363. Preserved as piece of cross-bar. Dated to the 11th-12th century. References: Štūma E. 1936, p. 114, fig. 7.e.
25. (19). Libaguri Sari, Talsu District, grave no. 39. LVM, A 12820:430, 431. 99.5 cm long, the blade 5.7 cm wide. Dated to the 12th century.
33. Pavriņy-Gudai, Akmene District, stray find. LNM, AR 610:13. 92 cm long, the blade 4.7 cm wide. The blade has an illegible inscription and marks. Dated to the 12th century. References: Žisanka A., 1975, p. 186-188.
34. (27). Pilatene Pasičiems, Ventspils District, find circumstances unknown. VE (St. Petersburg), 890/1089. 59.5 cm long piece, the blade 4.4 cm wide. Dated to the 11th-12th century. References: Kirpinovich A.N. 1966 a, fig. 18:6.
35. Pilatene Pasičiems, Ventspils District, unknown find circumstances. VE (St. Petersburg), 890/1088. 34.5 cm long piece, the blade 5.2 cm wide. The blade bears marks and remnants of an inscription. Dated to the 11th-12th century. References: Kirpinovich A.N. 1966 a, fig. 13:9, 15:1.
36. Pilatene Pasičiems, Ventspils District, excavations by Vasiliev. Find circumstances unknown. VM (Moscow), 35219. 70 cm long piece, the blade 4.6 cm wide. Dated to the 11th-12th century. References: Kirpinovich A.N. 1966 a, fig. 17:2.
37. Pilatene Pasičiems, Ventspils District, find circumstances unknown. LVM, R 139. 84 cm long piece, the blade 4.2 cm wide. Dated to the 11th-12th century.
References


35. Apie vieną Vikingų laikotarpio baltų kalavijų tipą

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Santrauka

Baltų kalavijai per daugelį amžių patyrė nemazų permainų, nėjėjo ilgai rados kelį nuo paprastosiausių vienamėnų didelio pelio su medine rankena pavidalo ir įrašų (Damaško) plieno dviašmenų ginklų su puošnia rankena, inkruztuota spalvotaisiais ir brandiniais metalais. Kaip prestižinės ginklas kalavijas buvo naudojamas tūkstančiais metų, ir jo gamyboje pirmiausiai atsipinirpo technologinė naujoves bei meniniai kalvių sugedėjimai. Todėl kalavijų istorija rodo ir bendras velyvosios amžiaus ginklų rados tendencijas, padeda jas geriau suprasti. 


Kalavijams būdingas penskų ar net septimų dalį buvo baltų siaurų, tiesių arba trumpų žemės lenkti variacinė skersiniai (1, 10 pav.). Rankėnų ornamentai motyvai yra unikalūs, aptinkami net tik ginklų puošyoje, bet ir vietių papuošų ornamentuose (2-7 pav.). Tik vienas kalavijas iš Pavyrūtos-Gudų, Kamenskų raj., geležinėje turėjo įrašą (8 pav.).
Dabar turimais duomenimis žinomi 64 kalavių aptikti: 40 archeologijos paminklų (9 pav.) iš jų 52 kalavių ar į jų dalys yra iš bažnyčių teritorijos. Už bažnyčių gyven- tų žemų jie randami retai. Keletas žinoma iš ugrų-suomų teritorijos Latvijoje ir Estijoje, slavų apgyventose žemėse Ukrainoje ir Lenkijoje, taip pat vieno kalavio skersinis rastas Gotlande, Švedijoje (9 pav.).


Pagal kapuose rastų įkapų komplektus (11 pav.), kuršių kalavių datuoti I-VIII a. Kuršių kalavių tirpi artimas baltų gamybos T tipas, todėl reikia manymui, kad pastarasis ir yra T tipo tolesnė raida.

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Scandinavian arrowheads in Lithuania

The territory of present-day Lithuania has never been a closed country. The external influences upon it were different in different periods. During the Soviet period they were ignored altogether, and it was only during the Eighties that discussions about closer and remote contacts between the Balts and neighbouring tribes began, including contacts beyond peaceful exchange or trade. Baltic-Scandinavian relations are known least of all.

Until now, only trade relations between Lithuania and Scandinavia have been discussed in archaeological literature (Kuncienė O. 1972. p.204-222; Vaitkuskiene L. 1983). Historians have noted early military-political conflicts between Western Lithuania and Southern as well as Eastern Scandinavia (Dundulis B. 1985. p.3-18). More serious historical studies, however, started only recently (Miclevičius A. 1991). The archaeological aspect of these problems remains unexamined. The available data enable us to take a closer look at one of the groups of witnesses of the old battles, namely iron arrowheads.

Among the different arrowheads found in the hillforts of Lithuania, a small group stands out, analogies of which are known in Scandinavia and regions connected with the Viking raids. All these arrowheads were found in a small area of North Western Lithuania, the sole exception being found in the Kaukai hillfort (South Western Lithuania) (Fig.1).

Arrowheads uncovered at the Apsuolė and Impštis hillforts as well as the settlement at the foot of the hillfort of Birutės Kalnas in Palanga, are attributed to the Vikings. The two hillforts were investigated by E. Volteris and V. Nagevičius in 1928-1934, but material from these was not published. Only photographs of these arrowheads, made during field investigations, were published (Nagevičius V. 1935. p.13) (Fig. 2). At present, finds and manuscript material on the two hillforts are stored at the Vytautas Magnus Museum in Kaunas (Inventory Nos.4551-85 and 4531-40; reports-those which have not been numbered, and Nr. 68, 69 respectively) The castle settlement of the hillfort of Birutės Kalnas in Palanga was investigated by V. Žulkius in 1983, 1990 and 1993. Investigation material was published (Žulkius V. 1986, 1989. p.37-56).

Special notice should be taken of Scandinavian arrowheads from Kaukai hillfort. The hillfort is situated in southern Lithuania, in a territory once inhabited by Latvianians, whose contacts with Scandinavians have not yet been documented. In 1967-1969 P. Kuklauskas excavated half of the flat hilltop there and investigated a section of the rampart. He dated the hillfort to some time between