The ancient West Balts came into contact, directly and indirectly, with the advanced material culture and foreign concepts of imperial Rome during the period known as the Old Iron Age (AD 1-400) in Lithuanian archaeology. Roman traders and their middlemen arrived to procure natural drift amber, an exotic material that would be transformed in the workshops of Aquileia into items much desired by the fashionable ladies of Italy: finger rings, necklaces and amulet pendants, ornately carved scent bottles and other miniature vessels, mirror-backs, and intricate figurines of deities, theater performers, and cupids riding dolphins and horses (Strong 1966). 1 This trade contact, some archaeologists believe, greatly stimulated the cultural evolution of Baltic society. They term it a “golden age” that saw trade embassies from Rome, and by the early third century cargo ships from the Frisian port of Fecchio (near Utrecht, Netherlands) anchor off the Baltic coastline, bringing in sacks of coins, metal tools and weapons, textiles, household wares and personal ornaments to be exchanged for amber (Michelbertas 1972, 1986; Jovača 1997, 1998). This allowed Balts to acquire new metal and farming technologies, plants and livestock, which in turn increased productivity and population and began to straitly Baltic society into nobles, farmers and slaves.

But is this an accurate reconstruction of Roman contact and influence in the southeast Baltic, and is it consistent with what we know about the simple level of Baltic social and economic organization at the time?

The largest excavated cemetery of the second-third centuries, for example, Sargėnai (Kaunas), has only 343 graves, equivalent to an associated community of 35-60 people; one of the largest hill-forts, Eketi, Klaipeda district, is surrounded by a settlement area that measures only 110 by 105m; and it was not until about the first century that Balts learned how to produce iron from local swamp ore (Michelbertas 1986: 18, 195, 207). Were the tribal Aectii 2 of Sambia equal trading partners with the Romans or simply “natives” dismissed with trinkets and beads?

1 The fashion for amber led to affections such as amber trusses for cutting truffles, and Jovaisa (Sat. 9.50-3) satirizes the custom of ladies carrying balls of amber (to warm the palms of the hands). According to Pliny (Natural History 37.12), Nero in his series described his wife Poppea’s ringlets of hair as auctitii (meaning amber-colored, as uvarum was the Latin noun for amber). Pausanias (V.27.7) mentions a life-size statue of Augustus made of amber (presumably a coating) standing in a round building in Olympia.

2 Tacitus writing in about 98 provides the first description of the Aectii (pronounced like “ICE toe”) in his Germania (45.3): “They explore the sea for amber, in their language called glosam, and are the only people who gather that curious substance. . . . (which) lay long neglected, till Romans learnt gave it its name, and brought it into request. To the streags it is of no use. They gather it in rude heaps, and offer it for sale without any form or polish, wondering at the price they receive for it.” Archaeologists can not define precisely the homeland of the Aectii, but must agree that it was probably the Sambian peninsula, and perhaps included the Lithuanian coast as well (Nowakowski 1992: 226).
In this study, we examine broad patterns in the distribution of Roman imports across Barbaricum, as Romans termed Europe north of the Ister frontier, and then look at the specific evidence of imports, particularly coins, among the West Balts. Our interest lies in the amber trade but we focus not so much on the amount of amber used or exported, as on the type of payment left behind by visiting traders. We hope to develop a regional model of the amber suppliers in the southeast Baltic and their role in the amber export system to the Roman world.

The terminus of the amber route was the Sambian peninsula (now the Kaliningrad district, Russia), where a single night of westerly storms could wash up several thousand kilograms of drift amber along its 80km of shoreline. Much drift amber could also be collected along the Vistula Spit of Poland, southwest of the peninsula, and the long Curonian Spit (now divided by Russia and Lithuania) which extends northeast of the peninsula. During the 1st-3rd centuries, five archaeologically-defined cultures (Nowakowski 1990: Fig. 1) surrounded the "supply zone" of amber: the Wielbark culture, generally identified with Gothic tribes and controlling the lowermost Vistula, the hybrid Bugaczew culture in the Mazurian lakes district, and three cultures that represented West Balts: the Sambian peninsula, the Neman culture, and along the western Lithuanian coast the Stone Circle Grove culture. Possible first contact between Romans and Balts is documented in Pliny's well known account of the Roman quaestors who journeyed along the coast of Novum from Carnuntum on the Danube to the southeast Baltic coast, and returned to Rome with much amber (for a useful commentary see Michelbertas 1995).

The pioneering nature of this journey, as noted by Wheeler (1954: 9), implies that the northern sectors of the amber route, including the Baltic region, had been up to this time inaccessible to Roman merchants and the oupe was attempting to regulate the entire length of the network. The knight may have been evaluating the feasibility of Roman military campaigns in the region, suggests Kolendo (1981). He also proposes that Nero's model was in part psychological: he wanted to impress the public with his ability to display enormous quantities of an exotic luxury that decorated not only the safety nets of his wooden amphitheatre, but the armor of the gladiators. Michelbertas (1995: 19) concludes that nine Roman bronze winged fibulae (type A238m dated to AD 40-80 and 258 to 50-100) found in Lithuania represent artifacts brought in by Nero's knights and provide evidence that he traveled the coast of Lithuania. It is true that beyond the iunium these fibulae are found only in Lithuania; the Sambian peninsula; Wrocław, Poland, and Pucheve, Slovakia (cf. Garboch 1965). Yet, they are not found along the coast of Lithuania, as one would expect, but are scattered inland across north-central Lithuania. One may also question why the knight, after traveling some 800km to purchase an enormous amount of amber, apparently gave his Balts suppliers little more than nine clothing fasteners, or "safety pins". The Balts burials which contain the winged fibulae are not notable for their wealth - the richest is at Sandauravna, Kurenieci district and features an "eye series" brooch, a bronze cock-ring, five bronze armbands and a socketed iron axe.

**Roman Imports Across Barbaricum**

Lorne Hedeager's excellent statistical approach (1978) to major Roman imports north of the Ister examined the distribution of six types of objects - bronze vessels, silver cups, weapons, brooches and pottery - in 100km intervals. The first four items, all of high value, shared one type of distribution: they increased in quantity as one moved north of the border, to about 600km, and then decreased (there was little difference between the east and west regions, and the early and late empire). Pottery, on the other hand, was abundant to only 200km and then dropped off sharply. The pattern of brooches was a special case: in the early period they have a rather high frequency to the west from 200-400km (along the Elbe) and to the east they increase remarkably after 600km, in northern Poland and the Sambian peninsula. Hedeager (1978: 204) interprets brooches to be "commercially insignificant parts of personal equipment", which German traders brought back after being in direct contact with Romans in the south. She concluded that Roman-Germanic trade north of the Ister had two economic systems. There existed a "buffer zone" out to 200km which maintained a limited money economy, perhaps including markets and a merchant class. Further out, the more distant Germanic tribes had moneyless markets or used money without a monetary economy. That luxury goods were not common in the buffer zone, but were concentrated at 400-700km from the border, suggested to Hedeager that societies in this region possessed strong political and military power, and were aggressive middlemen in the long-distance exchange routes. Several dozen "priscely graves" of the Lübke type (Egger 1949/50) are located in this 400-600km interval. They represent a first century elite network of local military leaders whose burials emphasize elegant Roman drinking vessels. One such grave at Lübke, Pomerania includes from the Roman world a pair of fine two-handled silver cups, a mirror-plate of white metal, a large bronze basin, a bronze wine bucket, two bronze ladles, one bronze pitcher, two glass bowls, bronze shears and tweezers, as well as locally produced items - two drinking horns, four brooches (one of gold and silver), two silver pins and bronze belt fittings (Wheeler 1954: 43).

Additional evidence that Roman exports were channelled into the hoards of powerful middlemen, leaving little for the primary suppliers at the end of the amber route, is found in the distribution of denarii hoards found north of the Ister, as compiled by Lennart Lind (1981). The silver denarius was the "value" coin in the imperial monetary system (together with the gold aureus, rarely found north of the border) from the time of Augustus to about 238 when the antoninianus replaced it as the staple silver coin.

Figure 1 shows the geographic distribution of 201 hoards, representing a total of 88,999 denarii.

The differently sized find-spots on the map reflect my categorization of the hoards into three types: small (1), medium (2) and large (3).
The island of Gotland has a high density of denarii hoards, but Lind (1976: 140; also see Fagerl 1967: x) believes that many of the very worn denarii there had been used in northern Poland, perhaps for centuries, before they arrived to Gotland. In Denmark the majority of denarii were deposited in the 4th century or later (Kromann 1993: 200). Scandinavian denarii therefore may not be relevant to our discussion of 1st-3rd century amber exchange. Figure 2 dates the denarii hoards by *terminus post quem* and compares their distribution in two "regions": 1) those primarily found in Poland, representing the Carnuntum-Vistula amber route, and 2) those located in the remaining areas of northern Europe. The similarity between the two sets of histograms is astounding. I admit this is a "macroview" that tends to wash out micropatterns, but it still raises the possibility that the same conditions -- whether economic, political or military -- which reduced the inflow of silver coinage along the amber route, were also at work throughout the rest of barbarian Europe. Up to about AD 138, we see that the inhabitants of northern Europe had little reason to bury their silver coins for safekeeping. The denarii buried during the reign of Antoninus Pius (138-61), on the other hand, deserve a closer look. The latter hoards show a substantially different picture of amber trade started at the Diener, as they do not follow the Baltic Sea: coin hoards along the Upper Nemunas and Ongava rivers are very rare. The near absence of denarii hoards within the Sambian peninsula, and other Baltic territory to the north and east, is quite remarkable. Despite being the endsource of the amber supply, the Baltic tribes were evidently not receiving a proportional share of silver in payment for the amber that was being supplied to the Romans. Of course, amber was not the only commodity exported south, but it was the most precious one. This is an issue to which we will return.

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*Under Domitian (81-96) a soldier was paid 300 denarii every year and by Severus (193-211) his salary had increased to 4,000 denarii per annum (Grene 1986: 39).*

*Both in and out of Gotland, the price of silver fluctuated from 301 to 125 stot, equivalent to 8,100 denarii per ounce (Hart 1996: 300).*

*That is, a group of coins found together in a hoard or burial is dated by the latest coin or reign, because the group could not have been buried until after the date of the latest coin which it includes. The histogram represents the collective total from each reign.*

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**Fig. 2 Number of denarii found in: 1. boards along the amber route in Poland, and 2. boards in the remaining areas of Barbaricum Europe. After Lind 1981.**

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in Lithuania (Michelbertas 1972: 87). The majority (about 60%) of the 1,200 Roman coins found in the territory of Lithuania represent ritual deposits in 150 graves. Based on this, Michelbertas (1964, 1995) has long held the view that West Balts used Roman coins as money in their small economic transactions. He believes the custom practiced at 24 coastal cemeteries during 180-260, of depositing a coin in a burial (usually a sestertius) to pay Charon in the afterlife for the ferry ride to Hadès, means the Balts were familiar with money as a form of payment.

But rituals undertaken in burial customs do not necessarily reflect the real world. In my opinion, money did not have much of a role in the barter economy of the Balts. First, only some 458 coins (38%) are known from 13 Lithuanian boards, if we can regard these as "economic" contexts (a possible bias here is that Lithuanian archaeologists have excavated far more cemeteries than settlements). Second, nearly all Roman coins (93%) found in Lithuania are of bronze rather than of higher value silver. This implies the ancient Balts ignored the rules of market economy; they preferred to receive (or were forced to accept?) lower-value sestertii?—large, glinting yellow coins, up to about 3.5 cm in diameter, with highly visible portraits and other images—apparently of talismanic value in their charon cult. Third, coin circulation is important to merchants that use money, and the total of 1,200 coins seems very low if it was to meet the transactions of an entire tribal population (one coin for every dozen people!). Fourth, if the West Balts had developed a money-integrated economy during the second-third centuries, why did it completely disappear with the retreat of Roman coinage and fail to remerge for another millennium?

It is precisely these factors—the preference for large bronze coins, their predominant use in ritual contexts, the scarcity of coins in "economic" contexts and the relatively small total number of coins—that set the West Balts apart from other regions of Barbaricum that may have had a more expanded use of money in their marketkrets. It reflects a unique cultural phenomenon: the distant and peripheral Balts practicing the exotic Mediterranean funerary cult of "paying the ferryman." Figure 3 shows the distribution of 2,407 century Roman coins in west Lithuania. It is based on the same 166 coins used by Michelbertas in his "use-span chart," but in my histogram the deposits are dated by terminus post quem. In Fig. 3, the coins from Trajan and Hadrian have no visibility at all (in great contrast to Michelbertas' chart) as they are subsumed in the bars representing later rulers. The reign of Antoninus Pius also precedes the most active period of coin deposition in west Lithuania. Instead, the histogram shows that maximum hoarding took place during or slightly after the reigns of Marcus Aurelius and Commodus. Decline in coin deposition is most strongly associated with coins from Septimius Severus. In my opinion, this finding does not support the idea (Michelbertas 1972: Bursche 1992a) that the Marcomannic wars in 166-180 fatally disrupted the amber trade. Commodus signed a treaty creating hostilities with the Marcomanni at the start of his sole reign in 180, so there was no reason to have much war-related hoarding along the amber route during his rule. In addition, it was likely that bronze hoarding at this time was turned over to the amber route during the time of Commodus, both silver coins not significantly hoarded along the rest of the route, or elsewhere in Barbaricum, until the reign of Septimius Severus (193-211) as indicated earlier by the Lind denarai data in Fig. 2.

While the Marcomannic wars do not provide a convincing explanation, neither, at this point, does the decrease in coin weight observed during the Antonine to Severian periods (255-38). Philip (244-49) debased bronze denominations with as much as 20 to 25 percent lead and by the reign of Galerius (260-69) the sestertius and the as disappeared as small change (Hart 1996: 134-135). The decline in sestertius inflow to the Balts of west Lithuania is thus unresolved.

Another analysis of west Baltic coin deposition is by Bursche (1992a and 1992b) who represent the same data. He uses a larger sample with more regional representation than Fig. 3. It includes 1,766 sestertii found in eight boards and 83 complex burial finds (i.e. two or more coins per burial) from former East Prussia and west Lithuania.37 I transformed the data presented by Bursche in his Table 1 (1992a) into a terminus post quem histogram—see Figure 4. At first glance, the Sambian-dominated distribution appears different from that of west Lithuania in that the deposits dated by coins from Commodus are overwhelmingly larger than those from all other rulers. A possible explanation is that Fig. 3 is actually a sub-set of Fig. 4. In other words, the latest coins from west Lithuania are generally earlier than those from Sambia, and this makes sense statistically if they were being obtained from the Sambian region. The opposite view—that the coins were going from Lithuania to Sambland—contradicts the process of population sampling. The Commodus "peak" in Fig. 4 again suggests to me that the Marcomannic wars caused a shift to bronze coin output: it moved not from Rome and from the Rhineland area using a sea route along the southern Baltic. This was earlier suggested by Gaertt (1929: 207) and supported by Michelbertas (1972: 69, 1986: 216). Bursche believes the "roundabout route" lasted until about 259, when intensified attacks by Germanic tribes across the Rhine closed it down. The trade then stagnated until the time of the Constantines, when coinage again begins to reach the West Balts by the traditional Via Latina route (Bursche 1992a: 10).

Bursche's theory is interesting and accompanied by a wealth of numismatic documentation. Much of the evidence, however, that he provides for Rhineland origins is not entirely convincing. He does not demonstrate that a break in imports actually occurred in the West Baltic circle at the time of the Marcomannic wars. He dismisses Godlof's conclusion (1985: 346) that no such break is present in the Sambian archaeological material, and that the inhibiting role of the Marcomannic wars is a "scholarly legend." Second, he
assumes that Danubian *limes fisa* (contemporary counterparts produced during the mid-third century) necessarily had to have been brought by traders traveling from Noricum and Pannonia Superior to the west Baltic. Yet, the *limes fisa* at these two provinces represent only some 19.4% of their post-Commodan AE (Bursche 1992b: note 42) – in my view, not an overwhelming amount. Further, he also assumes that *limes fisa* have not been found in the west Baltic area because they “would have been noted by S. Bolin” and “they are not mentioned by M. Michelberesa (1972) either” (Bursche 1992b: note 66). But do we really know that either investigator was attempting to identify these coins? Third, are Rhinelands hoards at this time analogous, as Bursche claims (1992a: 8), to those from the West Baltic circle? Their similarity, according to him, is based on their very slight share of dupondii (2%) and their similar proportions of autonomous emissions (10% in Rhinelands and 7.3% among the west Balts). It is known, however, that after Commodus and certainly by the 240’s the dupondii and the as had become rare (Burnett 1987: 58; Harl 1996: 30, 134), so the Rhinelands and west Baltic hoards merely reflect an empire-wide trend. Bursche’s estimate of the 10% provincial emissions in Rhinelands is based on a very small sample: four such coins among 35 post-Commodan sestertii in the Rheinl靳aschen district (Bursche 1992b: note 48). I venture to guess that much different percentages could be obtained by sampling other districts. Bursche himself (1992b: 236) implies this: “large amounts of autonomous coins were also recovered here [Rhineland] usually linked to movements of troops”.

**Locations of Mints**

Let us broaden our discussion to include all Roman coins (AE, AR and AU) found in the whole of ancient Baltic territory and attempt to identify where some were struck. Figure 5 shows the location of mints throughout the Roman empire whose products have been found at Baltic sites, and Table 1 provides a tabulation. In general, the mints listed in the table that operated from the first century to about the mid-third century represent autonomous provincial mints: the later mints are from a network of imperial branch mints that began to be established during the co-regency of Valerian and Gallienus (253-60) and continued to expand throughout the third century. Provincial coinage died out early in the west, during the first years of Claudius (41-54) and was totally replaced by imperial coinage. In the eastern provinces, however, local coinages continued to flourish for 250 years. The number of provincial mints grew gradually, reaching a peak during the reigns of Commodus (177-92) and Septimius Severus (193-211) when some 350 mints issued coins (Harl 1996: Fig. 5.1). Table 1 shows that with the exception of a single coin from Trajan there are no provincial coins found in Baltic territory that were struck by 1st or 2nd century emperors. This supports the idea that the majority of bronze coins found in Baltic territory struck during the first two centuries after Christ came from the senatorial mint at Rome. While they do not have a mint mark, the coins are marked with the initials S.C., standing for *Senatus Consultum*, or by decree of the *Senate*. A small cautionary note: a large part of the coinage with the mark S.C. was actually struck at a branch mint at Lugdunum Gaul, at least through Vespasian (78) and is recognizable by a small globe that stands at the point of the neck-truncation of the portrait bust (Sutherland 1974: 168). Very few AE from Augustus to Vespasian have been found in Baltic territory, and it is not clear if investigators have consistently looked for evidence of the Lugdunum globe.

By the time of Valerian and Gallienus a much wider range of mints is established (Carson 1990). In addition to Antioch, imperial branch mints producing substantial output were opened at Viminacium (251), Lugdunum (257), Milan (259), Siscia (262), and Cyzicus (268). Massive quantities of debased coinage are produced, in particular, the double denarius.

With a low value convenient for small transactions, the imperial coins become available to everyone, and between 255-275 nearly all provincial issues die out (Butcher 1988: 18-20). Table 1 shows that 32 coins, most of them provincials, have been found at Baltic sites, which were struck during the period 209-268 (many dated by s.p.xprm to no later than about 244). All are from the east: twenty-one come from Asia Minor and the eastern Mediterranean, while ten were minted in the west. The eight boards account for 1,535 coins (88% of his sample). They are from three west Baltic cultures: 1. from Sambria – Kudraska, Zinershpe, Mergershake, and Purptzinagi – representing a total of 1,446 coins (82% of sample); 2. ex-Schumolen and Smaurin in the Masurian lakes district; and 3. Sambodabsk and Sbalmenan in western Estonia. In sum, his sample overwhelmingly reflects the four Sambrian boards.

A useful thesis for a future dissertation is to continue the earlier work of Stern Bolin, Mykleb Michibersa, Vladislav Urnau and Alexander Bursche and compile a comprehensive database, including new finds, of all Roman coins found in the Baltic culture sphere and then use it to test alternative models.

The difference between provincial and imperial coinage is not always clear-cut, according to a study by Butcher (1988:12). At one end of the spectrum were the official coins struck by Roman imperial authorities for circulation in the western provinces and for government expenditures and tax collection. On the opposite end, coins mostly struck in the eastern provinces, primarily bronze pieces, had a mark stating that they belong to the people of a particular city and tend to circulate close to the city where they were issued. But there also existed, in the middle, a wide range of issues which sometimes had imperial sanction and sometimes did not, and circulated over a fairly large region.

The reverse type of AE from Antioch also bear the letters S.C. from the 1st into the 3rd century and was presumably sanctioned by Roman authorities, but these issues are easily recognised.
Southeast Baltic Exchange Model

A comparison of Roman imports found among the five cultures that surrounded the Sambian amber supply is useful in developing a regional model (Fig. 6). The model assumes that the stream of Roman goods flows from the central Danubian provinces, and not from the Rhineland as suggested by Bursche. By number, the most abundant Roman manufactured item was the humble, mass-produced tiny glass and enamelled bead. They are presented by the thousands, at least in the West Baltic cultures, usually in the burial of women and children. In many cases it is difficult for archaeologists to distinguish the early imported beads from those later locally made. By mass, the most significant import was probably bronze scrap metal, transformed by local smiths into an impressive array of ornaments and tools that characterise the regional cultures. The sources for bronze obtained by Balts, however, may have been established more than a millennium earlier so it does not seem appropriate to attribute bronze import exclusively to imperial Roman contact.

If we compare the distribution of Roman imports by quality and luxury, the Wielbark culture ranks first, followed by the Sambian and Boguzcwo cultures, with the two cultures in Lithuania having the fewest such imports (cf. Nowakowski 1995; Siemian 1999: 78-101). Apart from small gold and silver ornaments (not tracked in this study), imports of very high value are large ornamented bronze vessels. They are numerous in the Wielbark culture, in contrast to the other regions, each of which has only one or two bronzes. Terra sigillata red ware and glass vessels also represent imported luxuries – both items are present in the Wielbark, Sambian and Boguzcwo cultures, but are absent from the two cultures in Lithuania. The Wielbark territory has the largest hoards of silver coins in the region (Osja-Rywałd – 1000 (?); denarii; Juszcowo – 798; Golub – 556), and substantial deposits are known in the Boguzcwo culture (Dorotowob – 600 denarii; Złbójna – 200; Szytow – 200). By contrast, no silver hoard found in the Sambian, Nemunas and Stone Circle Grave cultures is greater than a few dozens coins. The Wielbark society is in evidence at the site of Węlkic, near the Vistula delta, currently excavated by Jerry Okulicz-Kozaryn. Grave 288 (Okulicz-Kozaryn 1992: Ryc. 3:5) contained a red gloss terra sigillata bowl with a rich moulded design of human and animal figures, a fluted bronze bowl (type E 44-49) dated to about 200-250, a ceramic skyphos cup in green glaze, a gilded silver foil medallion engraved with facing portraits of Marcus Aurelius and Lucius Verus (c. 164-165), a pair of ornate silver armbrants and bracelets, fine brooches, tweezers, a belt buckle and other items.

The Wielbark culture in the Mazurian area featured rich graves during the C1 period, and according to Siemian (1998: 93) enjoyed much closer ties to the Vistula delta culture than to the Sambians. One rare Roman import found at Sterkowsky Mały is a silver ring with a carnalian intaglio showing a boy milking a goat. A more mundane import, but much more important, is found among the wealthier graves at Swrajcaria – an iron-turning share from an advanced type of Roman plough (the Balts at this time were using wooden arks). Unfortunately, the associated burial can not be precisely dated (Siemian 1998: 94). The Sambian culture is notable for having the most bronze coins found in the region (about 2,807) with three-fourths of them in boards, but only 16 denarii have been found. It enjoys the curious distinction of also having the highest number (8) of Roman small bronze bells, trezlinadahle, which Nowakowski (1994) presumed were used in magical practices. The West Balts on or near the Lithuanian coast, as mentioned earlier,

20That is connected to the "peak period" of provincial mine under Caracalla, as suggested by Bursche (1990: 3) it is not a satisfactory explanation, because low mine had been numerous under earlier emperors as well; Hadrian – 250 provincial mines, Annonae Piae – 290, Marcus Aurelius – 250, Commodus – 340, Septimius Severus – 380 (Hassel 1996: Fig 5.1).

21 A small AE by Constantius II with a mine mark from Cyzicus (SMKE, officina S) and supposedly found at Vespis, Dragareski distr. Latvia is listed by Kriszman (1961: 101, no. 1468), but Ubelis (1997: 62) does not include it in his table.

22 If following Bursche's theory, third century Roman goods had arrived along a northern Baltic sea route, then primary trading would have been with the Sambian culture, followed by the Wielbark and eastern Lithuanian coastal cultures; secondary trading with the Nemanics culture, and tertiary trading with the inland Boguzcwo culture (in the poorest logistical position). Coastal settlements in Latvia, Estonia and Finland would have actively curtained for Roman goods. Roman histori- ans would not have been ignorant about societies on the eastern Baltic coast (Nowakowski 1992). This scenario, however, is not consistent with archaeological and historical facts.

23 In 1986, Michalowski (p. 102) estimated that some 2,500 heads were known from 31 OIA cemeteries in all of Lithuania. In an update, Medius (1997) estimated 5,517 heads for central Lithuania alone, for the period 50-400.
had the highest number of Roman winged profile brooches, as well as about a thousand bronze coins, but very few denarii. They also were importing from the Roman provinces indigo cloth or at least indigo dye (Indigofera tinctoria)—an unusual discovery made by E. Pečinskaitė (1998) during her analysis of minute fragments of textiles from the Lazdiniakai, Paraguay and Pajustis cemeteries near the Lithuanian coast.

The differential distribution of Roman imports among the amber supplier cultures, and their variable access to drift amber, suggests the existence of a regional hierarchy that controlled the export of local amber (Fig. 6). The Wirbelbark culture was in the best position for primary trading and profit; its boats could sail directly to the Sambian peninsula to obtain, inexpensively, large amounts of amber directly from the Sambians. Controlling the lower Vistula, its fleet was able to sail upstream to intercept and barter with fellow Germanic (?) middlemen from Carnuntum, making it unnecessary for them to continue on to Sambia. The Bogatcevo culture could pursue a similar course of action, but perhaps not as effectively. That large quantities of amber being were being placed in deposits 100–300 km from the coast is verified by the existence of amber processing centers in the Kujawy district, in Wielkopolska, in western Mazowsze and in Libanopolska (Wlochowski 1994: 22). The Sambians, or the Aestii, while possessing tons of drift amber at their doorstep, were faced with a distribution problem. Linguistically and ethnically different from the Goths to the west and southeast — separated by a “rear corridor” as some archeologists put it — it may have been difficult for Sambian traders to launch their own trading expeditions southwestward. They were forced to engage in secondary trading with Germanic middlemen and ended up with the less valuable goods from Roman provinces. The West Balts along the Lithuanian coast and the Nemunas river were in the worst position. Located between (i.e. north-east of) the Sambian peninsula, they had little reason to expect that traders seeking amber would come to them, while their own attempts to journey south would be resisted effectively by their three neighbor competitors. Consequently, they were forced to fall back on tertiary trade with the Sambians and had to accept with the even lower line of Roman items: no luxuries such as glass or terra sigillata vessels, perhaps one bronze vessel 17, bronze brooches and other ornaments, bronze rather than silver coins, thousands of tinker beads, and some dyed cloth.

The model helps explain Tacitus’ observation, cited earlier, that Aestii called amber glass in their own lan-

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Sambian culture is represented by former East Prussian counties of Ełk, Pruszcz, Freiland, Heiligendiek, Heidberg, Königsberg, Latvia and Wirbelbark (cf. Bolin 1926a). It is the fragment known from Kamienistzé, gr. N. 7 (Mickhelevits 1972: 24); it is a more impressive whole bronze brooch from Vertisai, gr. N. 197 (1954) is now thought to date to the late half of the D period and may represent migration period plunder — E. Jaunia, pers. com.).

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