

## ARCHAEOLOGICAL CULTURES AND ETHNIC HISTORY: SOME EXAMPLES FROM THE EAST BALTIC EARLY IRON AGE

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Problems of ethnic interpretations in archaeology are discussed. Despite the long history of ethnic studies, the eastern Baltic archaeologies lack a thorough and up-to-date discussion of the possibilities and impossibilities in the interpretation of material remains of culture in ethnic terms. The concepts of archaeological culture, social (group) identity and ethnic identity are analysed. It is demonstrated on the basis of eastern Baltic archaeological material that neither pottery traditions nor burial custom and metal artefacts have any direct connection with spoken languages. All of these aspects of material culture develop under different laws, at different speeds and over different regions, as do languages and social (incl. ethnic) identities. The breaks and innovations in these fields of culture are usually not synchronous, and they cannot be causally connected with one another. When mapping completely different occurrences, however, such as settlement pattern, economic and social relations – one can see that the main portion of the eastern Baltic region – characterised otherwise by an enormous amount of cultural differences – appears very uniform in the Roman Iron Age. At the same time, the supposedly sharp linguistic border between the Baltic Finns and the Balts also becomes visible as a kind of hindrance to communication between these neighbouring social groups.

*Key words:* archaeological culture, ethnicity, eastern Baltic region, Roman Iron Age.

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### Introduction

Despite some new developments in the last decade, the eastern Baltic archaeologies have nevertheless preserved their mainly cultural-historical character. Among many other factors, this is apparent from the very frequent use of the term 'culture'. Culture – as well as related terms, such as 'material culture', 'archaeological culture' or 'cultural layer' – is undoubtedly a fascinating topic for discussion. The problem, however, is that discussions of the term 'archaeological culture' (and particularly 'culture') are virtually non-existent in our archaeologies.

As is well known, the term 'archaeological culture' was gradually established within the so-called German school of 'settlement archaeology' and stated definitively by Gustaf Kossinna in the early 20<sup>th</sup>

century. Kossinna (1911, 3) interpreted this as follows: "*Scharf umgrenzte archäologische Kulturprovinzen decken sich zu allen Zeiten mit ganz bestimmten Völkern oder Völkerstämmen*". That is: the sharply defined archaeological cultures always correspond to certain peoples or tribes.

According to this definition, the most important feature of an archaeological culture was regarded – and not only in the German school of *Siedlungsarchäologie* but in all following treatments everywhere (see Meinander 1981) – to lie in its connection with an ethnic group. This supposed connection made it possible, using a retrospective method, to explore the ethnic history of ancient peoples. This method was subsequently widely distributed elsewhere in Europe, including the Baltic countries, where the earliest scientific treatments of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century had

already compared archaeological finds with certain prehistoric peoples.<sup>1</sup> Aarne Michaël Tallgren (1922) was responsible for the introduction and consistent use of the term 'archaeological culture' in Estonian archaeology, by trying to separate the cultures of Kunda and Võisiku and by comparing them with corresponding cultures in neighbouring regions. It is noteworthy that even as late as 1910, Richard Hausmann did not use such a concept in his general treatment on the prehistory of Estonia and Latvia; there the term 'culture' was employed in the general meaning of the word (Hausmann 1910). Yet for Tallgren, 'archaeological culture' was already firmly connected with prehistoric peoples, and cultural changes referred directly to the migrations of people (Tallgren 1922, 70–71).<sup>2</sup>

From those times, the distribution and change of archaeological cultures were treated in the Baltic archaeologies as a real ethnic history of local peoples. Although the first wave of such treatments can be dated from the 1920s and especially the 1930s, the main research in this field began in Estonia in the 1950s, under the leadership of Harri Moora (see, for instance, the collection of articles published both in Estonian and Russian: EREA 1956; VEIEN 1956) and followed with analogous studies since the 1970s in Lithuania and Latvia (e.g. Denisova 1977; PEEIB 1985; Lietuvių etnogenezė 1987; LEH 1997).<sup>3</sup> The fundamental methodology of those works was the same everywhere: the archaeological

cultures (treated as internally homogeneous) were equated with similarly homogeneous ethnic groups, languages and races. The approach was usually a *multidisciplinary* one, i.e. different disciplines – such as linguistics and physical anthropology in particular (e.g. Mark 1970; Denisova 1977) – were involved; yet, the *interdisciplinary* analysis of the entire problem was rather modest. The theoretical discussion of the essence of archaeological cultures and their probable ethnic meaning was almost entirely lacking.

Nevertheless, some theoretical discussion was presented in a programmatic article written by Moora (1956) – he called upon researchers to be cautious when comparing the stages in the development of culture and language, because they both develop according to different laws and at different speeds. According to him, only such archaeological cultures which were sharply differentiated from each other (like, for instance, the border between the northern and southern Baltic regions in the Roman Iron Age expressed by the differences both in burial custom and find assemblages) were comparable with ethnic or linguistic groups. He was convinced that not all cultural changes are an expression of the language change and, hence, the change in the ethnic composition of that people. However, such an approach did not essentially differ from that of Kossinna, who had also emphasized not simple and weak cultural differences but 'sharply defined' cultural provinces. In

numerous later works on ethnic history published in the Baltic countries, analogous discussions are already completely absent. In some treatments from the late 1980s and early 1990s, one can find, in the introductory parts, a declaration that an archaeological culture is not equal to an ethnos, language group or anthropological type; in the following analysis, however, the said phenomena were nevertheless irresponsibly equated (Tõnisson 1990).

### Archaeological cultures and social identities

Concerning the topic of this article, we should first define archaeological cultures, socially determined group identity and ethnic identity.

(1) **Archaeological culture** is an artificial term created by archaeologists merely for the organization of archaeological material, and it refers to the spatial and temporal coexistence of certain types of artefacts and/or antiquities. According to this definition, an archaeological culture has nothing in common with real nations or ethnic groups from the past because its definition is not (and cannot be) related to them. According to Stephen Shennan (1989), archaeological cultures cannot be considered as historical actors since they have not been real entities, and therefore cannot be equated to other entities, such as tribes, societies and ethnic groups. Keeping this in mind, more "neutral" words and terms like a type, style, complex, techno-complex, etc. are much better suited to the description of archaeological material, and they have already been widely used (Lang 2001). Fundamentally similar terms to archaeological cultures are also 'proto-languages' and 'anthropological types', which were created by linguists and anthropologists respectively, for the systematization of their materials, and which – in such a way – have never existed in reality

(see also: Lang 2001; Brather 2004, 92 ff).

When examining the distributions of individual types of archaeological material, one finds not neatly bounded entities but an enormous variety of overlapping patterns. In order to demonstrate the variety of such overlapping patterns of different types of archaeological finds and sites, one can take the maps of the East Baltic region during the Roman Iron Age (see below and compare figs. 1–4). What an enormous amount of different borders! Which borders can be taken as the borders of the archaeological cultures? Which borders can be left aside? It becomes clear from these maps that – no matter how one decides to portray or distinguish the archaeological cultures in the East Baltic region – they cannot be either internally homogeneous or sharply separated from the analogous neighbouring 'cultures'. This is mainly because the people who lived in the region in question had similar means for livelihood (agriculture) and similar settlement patterns (living most likely on farms); they also had close and long-lasting social and cultural contacts (communication), causing such phenomena as the acculturation and infiltration of cultural traits over an entire region.

(2) All societies consist of social groups, which are based on the self-conscious determination of the individuals according to some specific features in certain situations (age, gender, activity, lineage, region of origin, religion, etc.), (Hess et al. 2000, 55 ff). Such identification with a group (in which some individuals are included and some others are excluded; i.e. the understanding of 'us' and 'them') is called **social or group identity**. All social groups – from the family up to regional and religious groups and peoples – can be understood through the existence of group identity. Group identities are neither homogeneous nor enclosed; they have 'centres of identity' (so-called cores of traditions) and 'peripheries' (with weaker feeling of

<sup>1</sup> This method was used, for instance, in the investigation of questions concerning the origins of the Goths, Stone Age peoples or the location of the Baltic tribes on the basis of archaeological, linguistic and historical sources; see Grewingk 1874; 1877; Bielenstein 1892). The historiography of the Gothic problem in the Baltic archaeologies has been recently presented by Andres Tvauri (2003).

<sup>2</sup> As a matter of fact, in the last years of his life Tallgren became more doubtful and cautious on this matter (see Tallgren 1939).

<sup>3</sup> The Baltic countries do not form an exception in terms of the large volume of ethnic studies, while investigations of a generally very similar nature were also carried out elsewhere in East Europe and Russia. Ethnic studies, both in archaeology and linguistics (added recently with genetics), have also been very popular in Finland ever since the 19<sup>th</sup> century (e.g. SVEJ 1984; PP 1999; Wiik 2002).

identity). There are no sharp borders between the identity groups, which for the individuals makes the transition from one to another relatively easy. In the same way, social groups are usually not stable or long-lasting; they can – according to changing situations – quite easily change not only the members but also the identity and character of actions. As pointed out by Brather, the basic structure of all group identities is similar, but the particular expression of certain identities depends on corresponding social and economical relations, i.e. they are culture-specific. The intensity and character of identities also depends on the dimensions and organisation of groups: the smaller the groups are, the stronger their identity.<sup>4</sup> Social identities strengthen and legitimate the existing social order because they explain it; they form frameworks for the social action of both the groups and individual members – and therefore they are conservative (see Brather 2004, 97–103 and literature cited there).

Nonetheless, not all social groups have a similar role in the creation of (larger) identities and corresponding ideologies. The most important role, in this aspect, belongs to elite groups, which represent the so-called cores of tradition, while the common members of a group do not usually have a comparable relation to the ideology of a larger group. It is namely the elite that uses collective or cultural memory (myths concerning the origin of the group, genealogies, rituals, etc.) for the creation of such identity, also including – under certain circumstances and in more complex societies – ethnic identity (Brather 2004, 112 ff.).

(3) **Ethnic identity** is a special form of group identity, which should cover not only the individual groups but the society as a whole (Brather 2004, 104, 111). It

should refer to self-conscious identification with a particular group characterised by a specific locality and the belief in a common origin (history), in the same customs and manners, spoken language, laws, etc. Ethnicity has not existed always and everywhere; if it once does exist, however, it is fundamentally important for the self-determination of people. Ethnic identity could not develop in isolation; it is a medium of interaction between groups: if there is no complementarity between groups, one cannot speak of ethnic identity either (Barth 1969). Interaction takes place if (1) groups are competing for the same ecological niche (i.e. the same territory or resource), or (2) groups are occupying different territories or niches and are mutually dependent on each other (*ibid.*).

According to Frederick Barth (1969), an ethnic border is above all a social border; it might also be a territorial border, but not necessarily. If this border is designated by some cultural elements, they usually change over time, as do societies. As pointed out by many researchers, this is not the entire material culture which has been used for the demonstration of identity, but only some individual traits of it (they vary over time and space, and are often not visible at all in the archaeological record), (see more: Lang 2001; Brather 2004, 106 ff.). An ethnic group – as any social group – exists as long as the differentiation insider/outsider exists; it is important that the others (outsiders) recognise and accept this group. The integration and identity disappear when the recognition assigned by the others disappears.

In this way, ethnic identity as a collective awareness about the cultural (incl. linguistic) homogeneity with a politically and socially determined group (Brather 2004, 106), is assumed to be of relatively late origin, probably connected with the emer-

gence of more complex societies.<sup>5</sup> Even in the European Middle Ages, ethnicity has been described by many researchers as a very flexible, transient and easily changeable phenomenon, which perhaps gained importance during the period (see: Brather 2004; Markus 2004, 34 ff.). It is unlikely, therefore, that the differences between, for instance, distinct Stone Age or Early Metal Age archaeological cultures in the eastern Baltic region were products of the expression of different ethnic identities – ethnicity as a specific social strategy, as we know it from history, certainly did not exist in such early times.

The difference between the ideal models of an archaeological culture and ethnic group becomes clearly visible in the figure presented by Ulrike Sommer (2003, fig. 2). The features characterising an archaeological culture are concentrated at its centre (core), while their amount and frequency are decreasing towards the peripheral zones. In the case of an ethnic group the situation is, theoretically, the opposite: the amount and frequency of ethnic markers should be greatest in the border areas, adjacent to the neighbouring group, and their role should decrease towards the core.

### Material remains of culture and ethnic studies

As mentioned in the introduction, the Baltic archaeologists – as well as their colleagues in Russia, Finland and many other countries – have been convinced in the appropriation of ethnic studies by archaeological means. The discussion carried out in Western archaeological literature during recent decades about the possibility of

studying ethnic history in the prehistoric past has, on the contrary, mostly concentrated on demonstrating why and how it is not possible to compare archaeological cultures and ethnic (linguistic) groups.<sup>6</sup> Thus the problem remains: is it at all possible to draw conclusions about ethnogenesis, (the formation of ethnic groups, tribes, peoples) on the basis of archaeological evidence, i.e. material remains of culture?

In this context, at least two aspects are clear. First, people have made different things in different places and at different times (i.e. the variability of material remains of culture in space and time). Second, people have spoken different languages in different regions and at different times (the variability of language in space and time). What then belongs to the ethnic identity of groups – although it certainly already existed in prehistoric times – I still cannot share the optimism of those who claim that archaeology is able to explore this social phenomenon using archaeological means. The principal question is therefore: does *linguistic variability* have anything to do with the archaeologically observable *variability of material remains*?

According to Ian Hodder (1992, 11 ff), so-called material culture is material from one side and cultural from another, and material culture has always been meaningfully constituted and interpreted through culture. Both artefacts and sites (graves, houses, field systems, cultic places, etc.) always bear some meaning in the general cultural sphere and therefore reflect different aspects of 'immaterial' culture. As pointed out by some other researchers (e.g. Müller-Beck 2003), it is not at all accept-

<sup>4</sup> For instance, identity in so-called primary social groups (based on affiliation with a family, clan, neighbourhood, particular ideology, etc.) is much stronger than in secondary social groups formed on the basis of larger communities (Hess et al. 2000, 56–57, tab. 4.1).

<sup>5</sup> According to Sebastian Brather (2004, 118), the earliest written evidence on the use of ethnic identity comes from Greece, where the concepts *hellenēs* and *bárbaroi* were elaborated between the 8<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> centuries BC.

<sup>6</sup> Some researchers, for instance Sebastian Brather in his recently published comprehensive monograph (2004), deny any possibility of archaeological ethnic studies; others are more optimistic in this field (e.g. Renfrew 1998; Dolukhanov 1995; Sommer 2003).

able to dissociate 'material' and 'immaterial' ('mental') cultures – all that we have is human culture as a whole. Our question must therefore be transformed to the following: Is the variability of language connected with other aspects of human culture, such as religious beliefs (reflected in burial and cultic customs) or social relations (social structure, ownership rights, mating networks, etc.), or settlement pattern (village or single farm settlements) etc. In other words, the question lies in the culture as such: How are its different aspects interrelated and interconnected?

The possibilities of answering this question, however, exceed the limits of archaeology because language – as one important component of the problem – does not leave material remains. To some extent ethno-archaeology and cultural anthropology can help here, at least in the general discussion; yet in the case of particular prehistoric situations, these disciplines are not so powerful either. Different social identities – i. e. subjective self-determinations of people – can in certain circumstances provide some archaeologically observable patterns, although the discovery and interpretation of these always remains problematic.

In the following I will discuss the possibilities and impossibilities of some material remains of culture in the study of the formation of social groups and ethnic history. At the same time, I will demonstrate the distribution and probable interpretation of those features in the East Baltic region during the Roman Iron Age.

## Pottery

Pottery has been the main, and often the only criterion used for the differentiation of archaeological cultures. From one aspect, the clay pot is a functional, utilitarian thing. From another side, the technology and decoration of ceramics express

some models and traditions in cultural thinking that have been common to people of smaller or larger regions. The question is: What actually connected those people who made similar pottery?

Until pottery was made in domestic households, the distribution of similar forms, surface finishes and decorations of pots mostly reflected the limitations and traditions of communication between those households. Ethno-archaeological investigations have demonstrated that in societies with subsistence economies, the pottery-makers were most often women (e.g. Knopf 2003, 190). Consequently, pottery should reflect the "women's world" – the way in which women or their experience and way of thinking moved through time and space. One cultural and social structure used to understand this phenomenon is the so-called 'mating network' – i.e. that aggregation of groups from which a member of a given group will obtain a mate (Jacobs 1994). Christian Carpelan (1999; 2000) has presented the idea that the distribution area of a similar pottery style would represent nothing but an ancient mating network in the frames of which pottery was made by women sharing the same "pattern book", i.e. a common tradition. According to this explanation, women living in the area of the distribution of one pottery style had to be related with each other through either communicative or even genetic lines. That does not mean, however, that all people living in this particular area spoke one language. The population density in north-east Europe during the Neolithic and Early Bronze Age was so low that the mating networks could not be limited to artificial borders – and in that case, the mate could be found in the nearest possible place, notwithstanding her/his linguistic, cultural, racial, etc. features (Jacobs 1994). This brought about close linguistic contacts as well as cultural and anthropological mixing over expansive areas (Robb 1993, 750;

Künnap & Lang 2000). In the area of one pottery style, different languages may have been spoken; one may, however, presume that in the core – where that pottery style was established and where one can find the majority of such pots – the social interaction was more intense and the cultural (and why not also linguistic) proximity (identity) greater than farther off in the periphery.

The situation somewhat changed in approximately the 1<sup>st</sup> millennium BC and the early 1<sup>st</sup> millennium AD, when mating networks evidently gradually became closed, i.e. a mate was obtained from within a certain group. The question now is: what were the criteria limiting such connections? Was it language, religion, ideology, social partnership, or some moral or ethical beliefs? Until we know the answer, it is impossible to draw direct comparisons between the pottery groups of earlier Metal Ages and spoken languages. It seems, however, that the borders that were established for whatever reasons between the mating networks, and which proved to be stable over time (not necessarily in space), also became stepwise in linguistic barriers. It therefore seems plausible that pottery groups of later prehistoric and historical times do correlate with linguistic groups much more closely than in earlier periods.<sup>7</sup>

The whole phenomenon of pottery making is not exhausted with the circumstances discussed above. There are also aspects concerning the distribution of pottery by trade (for instance the distribution of Greek and Roman wine amphorae all over barbarian Europe during the Pre-Roman and Roman Iron Ages) or under the pressure of ideology. The distribution of Corded Ware (mostly drinking

cups) might serve as an example of the latter, and probably reflected some manners of the Late-Neolithic elite over large areas of Europe (i.e. drinking, feasting, hunting, warfare; see Renfrew 1998, 86 ff, 92 ff and the literature cited therein; Lang 1998).

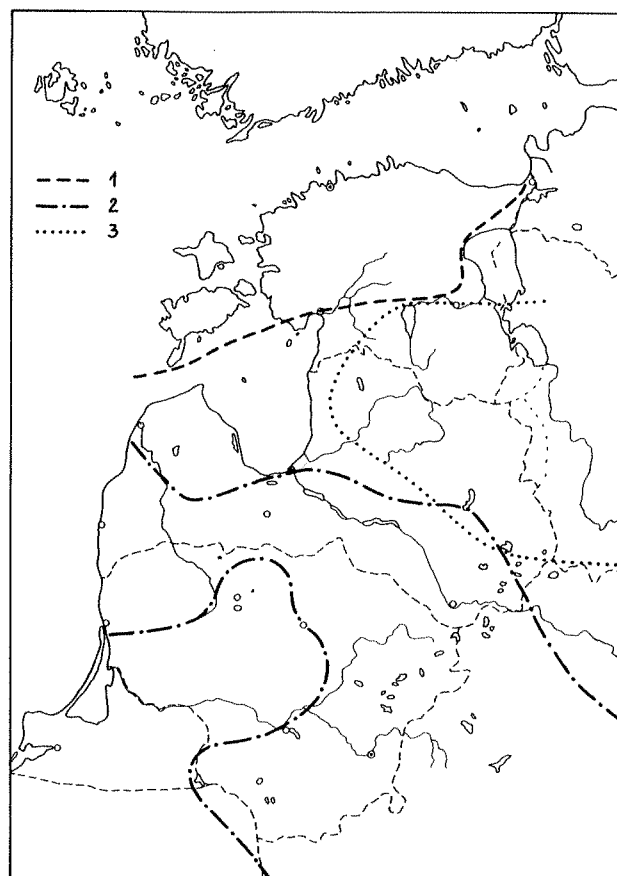
There were three main pottery provinces in the East Baltic region during the Roman Iron Age (fig. 1). In eastern and northern Lithuania and southern Latvia one can mostly find striated (or so-called late striated) pottery (with several sub-groups), which was the westernmost occurrence of this ceramics tradition characteristic of large regions of East Europe (Vasks 1991, 91 ff). North-eastern Latvia and south-eastern Estonia were similarly the westernmost areas for the making of late textile-impressed pottery (Laul 2001, fig. 76), while in the rest of Estonia, Roman Iron Age pottery had smoothed or slightly striated surfaces (being rather different from southern Baltic striated pottery). Particularly for the areas of the East European forest belt, textile-impressed pottery has traditionally been connected by archaeologists with (east) Finno-Ugrian, and striated pottery with (east) Baltic tribes (e.g. Moora 1956, 65 ff, 72; Tret'yakov 1966, 125 ff, 174 ff). In the Baltic region, the border between textile-impressed and striated ceramics lay north of the Daugava River; it is interesting that this border was also repeated in the location of both different grave types (those of *tarand*-graves and sand barrows) and assemblages of grave goods (see below, figs 2–4).<sup>8</sup> These circumstances have given sufficient reason to speak of different language groups living on opposite sides of this line, the more so because we are not – as already supposed by Tallgren (1922) and Moora (1938; 1956) and generally accepted by all other researchers – dealing with minor linguistic variations here, but instead

<sup>7</sup> This is also proved by some ethno-archaeological studies carried out in different regions of the world, see for instance: Rice 1984, 73 ff.

<sup>8</sup> According to Andrejs Vasks (pers. comm.), during the Early Roman Iron Age striated pottery disappeared from those areas of Latvia known by the distribution of barrows, and was replaced with pottery characterized by smoothed surfaces.



**Fig. 1.** The main pottery provinces of the Roman Iron Age in the East Baltic region. 1- pottery of northern and western Estonian style, 2- late striated pottery, 3- late textile-impressed ware.



distinct differences between two language families (Finno-Ugrian and Indo-European), that made communication across the border difficult. The other borders of pottery groups were usually not repeated by the distribution of other artefacts, except for that between south-east Estonia and central and northern Estonia, which was also expressed by some differences in the assemblages of grave goods.<sup>9</sup> It is noteworthy that differences between the style of ceramics made in two parts of Estonia – in the south-east and in the north – continued in

the second half of the 1<sup>st</sup> millennium (compare: Aun 1976 and Lang 1985). This difference decreased and disappeared in the early 2<sup>nd</sup> millennium, particularly due to the occurrence of (market-oriented) wheel-made pottery.

### Burial customs

Burial customs, grave types and grave goods, often treated as features for archaeological cultures, also vary in space and time,

whereas more or less similar burial customs usually characterise entire regions. It is evident that pottery groups usually do not coincide with areas of similar grave types, which makes it difficult to use these two criteria contemporarily for the definition of an archaeological culture. What actually connected these people who erected similar graves? And what is the significance of similarity or difference in connection with grave building and burial customs?

Burial customs mostly reflect religious beliefs that might have been shared by several groups of people speaking different languages. When dealing specifically with monumental above-ground grave buildings, one must take into consideration the peculiarities of the social behaviour of the elite. The erection of such graves by an elite group served both as a means for the legitimization of their social power and ideology and for the creation of group identity; monumental above-ground graves were never used for the burial of all of the people settled in a given area. In this way, monumental graves reflect both the religious beliefs and social strategies of one part of society, and this had no consequences for the language spoken by the entire population of a certain area. This means that we are dealing with group identities rather than ethnic identities. In the course of time and under certain circumstances, the identity of an elite group could develop into the ethnic identity of a larger population; one must, however, distinguish between these two when dealing with earlier prehistoric periods (see above). The social

and religious behaviour of the elite groups belong to the world of 'men's games', and this was perhaps the reason why the distribution of grave types does not usually coincide with that of pottery, which reflects the women's sphere.

As pointed out by some researchers, the rites of passage connected with the main life-cycles (death, for instance) might contain reflections of ethnic identity (e.g. Markus 2004, 40–41, and literature cited therein). Thus burial customs might be relevant in ethnic studies; one must, however, consider that not only one group but the entire population must in that case share the same custom; i.e. to build similar graves and to furnish burials with grave goods in a similar way. In Estonia, for instance, we can speak of burial customs as an expression of ethnicity not before the Middle Ages, when the local rural population began to bury their dead in so-called village cemeteries, thus opposing themselves to the Germans who lived in towns and estates and had different burial customs (Valk 2001). And here, again, the main determinations were not of an ethnic but religious (syncretism) and social (lower class) character, being equally common for the peasant population of Estonian origin.<sup>10</sup> All other grave types of earlier prehistoric periods can be interpreted as the burial sites of some distinguished groups within societies, reflecting corresponding group identities. The same seems to hold true for the southernmost East Baltic region.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>9</sup> The main differences between southeastern and central/northern Estonia lies in the preference of different ornaments. For instance, finger-rings were very popular in central and northern Estonia, but rather rare in the southeast (see Lang 1995, table 1); there were also differences in the typology of some brooches (particularly in the later Roman Iron Age), while the majority of grave goods demonstrate similarities in both these regions (compare: Laul 2001 and Schmiedehelm 1955).

<sup>10</sup> At the same time, Estonians with somewhat more outstanding social position could also bury in churchyards, and those who lived in towns did so in town cemeteries. Immigrants of foreign ethnic origin living in the countryside buried their dead in village cemeteries.

<sup>11</sup> Even if we examine areas that are rather evenly covered with cemeteries (which sometimes might be rather large) – like, for instance, Latgallia in the Late Iron Age (see Rādiņš 1999) – we cannot take for granted that all of the population was buried in those graves. In Latgallia there are 200 flat cemeteries and 50 groups of sand barrows (with some 4000 barrows) registered and interpreted as the burial grounds of the Latgallians. Taking into account that each of those flat cemeteries contains an average of ca 300 burials, and each barrow covers one to two burials (Rādiņš 1999, 170–171), one can calculate that the average population buried in flat cemeteries was around 2100–2200, and that of barrow cemeteries was around 600–700 people (the mortality rate being

When studying group identities on the basis of burial customs, it seems that not all details concerning the shape of graves and the composition of grave goods are equally important. For instance, the differences in the typology of brooches (either a crossbow or disk-shaped fibula) or spearheads (either an A or B type weapon) were probably not as significant as the usage (or non-usage) of brooches or spearheads as such. The material the graves were built of (either stone or earth) most likely depended on natural conditions rather than group identities; yet, such circumstances as the monumentality and visibility of graves (they were either meant to last forever and be visible to everyone, or were hidden underground; the graves were built either for individual or for collective burials) should be studied more carefully in this respect. Only the mapping of differences and similarities of this kind can offer us information about the existence and usage of social and cultural identities.

Several grave types and different burial customs from the East Baltic Roman Iron Age (fig. 2) have been reported. In northern, central and southern Estonia as well as in northern Latvia and northern Courland, the main grave type was the so-called *tarand*-grave. The latter were monumental above-ground stone graves consisting of a number of rectangular enclosures (called *tarands* in Estonian), used for collective burials, mostly cremations. Individual burials cannot be distinguished in these graves. Grave goods are high in number

but consist mostly of ornaments (especially brooches and bracelets); weapons are almost completely absent, and (bigger) tools are rare. There are some differences in the assemblages of grave goods between the different regions, which may refer either to differences in burial customs (e.g. the absence of funeral pottery in north-eastern Estonia) or in clothing and decoration (e.g. the infrequent use of finger-rings in South Estonia, see above). As there is much evidence that only one part of the population was buried in *tarand*-graves (Lang 1995) – and the majority was buried in other ways not visible by archaeological means – it is clear that these graves manifested a kind of elite group identity.

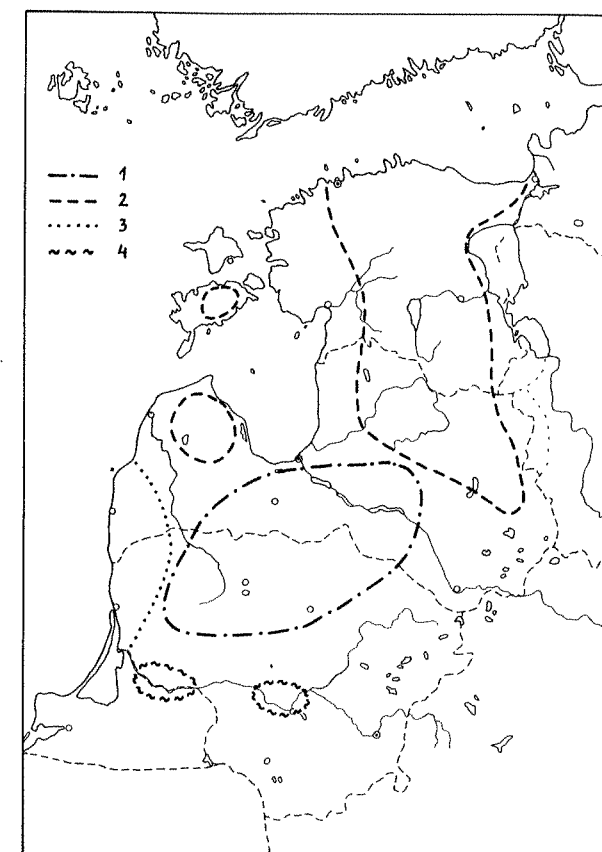
Another grave type – barrows of earth – was present in central and southern Latvia and northern Lithuania. These barrows usually contain some stone structures (most commonly circles on the original ground) and several inhumation burials. The number of burials in one barrow can differ, but generally does not exceed one dozen.<sup>12</sup> The assemblage of grave goods differs remarkably from that of *tarand*-graves: weapons and bigger tools are numerous,<sup>13</sup> while neck-rings and decorative pins dominate among the ornaments. In southern Latvia, i.e. in the neighbourhood of the northern Latvian *tarand*-graves, brooches and pottery are almost completely absent in the barrows (Šnore 1993), which indicates a clear difference in comparison to their northern neighbours. Judging from the small number of

ca 30 %). It is evident that these numbers are too small to cover the entire Latgallian population and all cemeteries in the Late Iron Age (for instance, the number of medieval village cemeteries in southern Estonia, which is not larger than Latgallia, is ca 1200; Valk 2001, 19) – i.e. this is a manifestation of group identity („upper middle class”, for instance) and not ethnic identity.

<sup>12</sup> This number is close to that supposed for burials in one enclosure, *tarand*, of the large *tarand*-graves. Due to the burial customs, single burial complexes are discernable in the barrows, but not in the *tarands*.

<sup>13</sup> It should be mentioned that weapons and/or bigger tools (spearheads, socketed axes and larger knives) also appear – although in small numbers – in northern Latvian *tarand*-graves (Moora 1929). Thus the latter form a kind of transitional occurrence if one compares the Estonian *tarand*-graves and Latvian barrows.

Fig. 2. The main grave types of the Roman Iron Age in the East Baltic region. 1- barrows of earth, 2- *tarand*-graves, 3- pit graves with stone enclosures, 4- cemeteries with simple pit graves.



graves and burials, the barrows, too, were used for burial by only one societal group. There are some differences in the grave goods' assemblages in the Lithuanian part of the barrows' area of distribution (e.g. the occurrence of brooches, see: Michelbertas 2004, and the infrequent use of spearheads), indicating some differences in the local group's ideology.

The third main grave type are found in the western coastal zone of Latvia and Lithuania – i.e. pit graves with stone enclosures (or 'stone-circle graves', see: Banytė-Rowell & Bitner-Wróblewska, this volume). The enclosures were most commonly ring-shaped, but ovals and rectangles also occurred. Single inhumation burials were placed beneath the original ground and richly furnished with grave goods (weapons and ornaments, mini-

ature clay pots, Roman coins, sometimes even horses). These graves were undoubtedly also made for the burial of one (rather elite) part of the population.

In some restricted areas of central Lithuania and on the lower reaches of the Nemunas River there are some cemeteries (8 and 5 respectively) with known pit graves that exhibit differences (like the absence of stone structures) from the burial grounds mentioned above (Michelbertas 1986, 41–54). As such cemeteries are known only in small numbers, they also reflect a burial tradition of one social group, and not an entire population.

In the Baltic archaeological tradition, all of these groupings of graves have been interpreted as the material remains of different ethnic groups, retrospectively drawn from those societies known from late pre-

historic and medieval written sources, such as the northern and southern Estonians, Latgallians, Semigallians, Zhemaitians, Cours, Scalvians, etc. (e.g. Jaanits et al. 1982; Laul 2001; Šnore 1993; Michelbertas 1986). One must consider, however, that it was only a smaller part of the population that was buried in the above-mentioned graves. It is therefore likely that we are dealing with the manifestation of (elite) group ideologies, and not with the remains of the behaviour of entire population. Of course, those groups may have spoken different languages and dialects (they may also have shared one language); nevertheless, the reason for the formation of the groups was probably not the feeling of ethnic (linguistic) identity but rather the social and ideological needs of people possessing an outstanding position in society. At the same time, we do not know how strictly the elite groups were distinguished in the society, and how they were separated from the common people. It is not likely that the borders between different social groups were sharp, strong and uncrossable; they were instead quite flexible.

### Metal artefacts

The distribution areas of specific metal artefacts do not usually coincide with those of pottery groups and grave types. Artefacts were made by smiths, who were usually men, and whose social status in the society was high. Different categories of artefacts were developed under different rules: the making of weapons followed military needs, but their design was certainly also dependent on the development of fashion and social order. The making of ornaments followed regional directions in fashion, while functional requirements were responsible for the development of tools. As was the case with the rest of the elite, smiths were also obviously rather

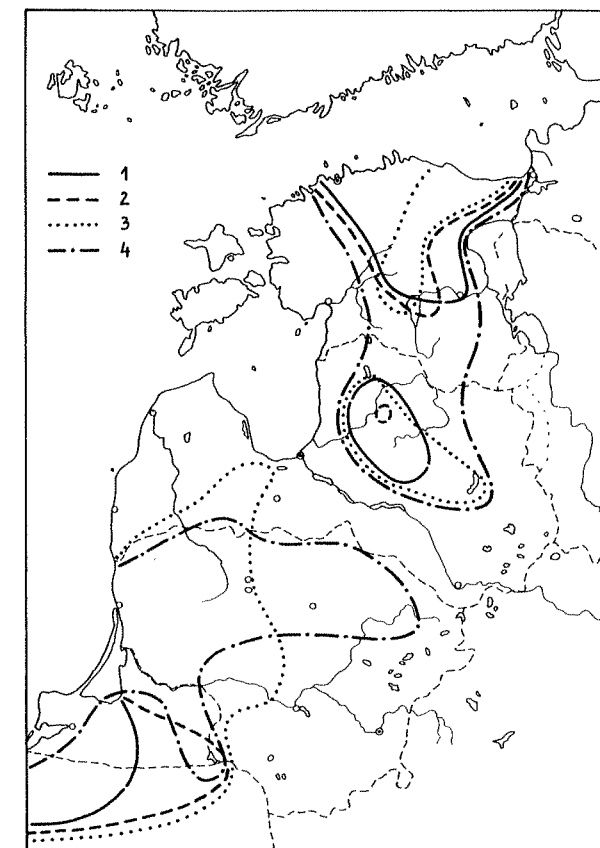
well informed what products and by which technology were produced elsewhere; this is why many technologies, types and decorations were quite widely distributed.

The distribution of metal artefacts primarily reflects the location of different 'workshops' and contacts between them, but also the directions of exchange and trade. These phenomena do not have direct connections with the variability of language. The only exception is when a (sharp) language barrier also presents a hindrance to closer communication between neighbours. Even the most remarkable language borders, however, cannot be taken as a kind of 'Berlin Wall' in prehistory; there is plenty of data indicating the frequent crossing of such barriers. There is only the question of the intensity of communication that could not be as high between groups speaking completely different languages as it probably was between linguistically kindred groups.

It is nevertheless evident that different groups of people gradually elaborated their own preferences and traditions concerning different features of the material world. In the case of neighbouring groups, these differences in the types and decoration of artefacts were not sharp – even in the case of the representatives of different language families – but there were differences that were gradually taking shape, for instance, in the assemblages of ornaments or in the preference of certain combinations of tools and weapons, etc., particularly in the composition of grave goods (see above). These aspects of the development of the material culture of different groups in the East Baltic region have not yet been sufficiently studied.

Due to the limitations of this paper it is not possible to analyse the Roman Iron Age artefact assemblages of the eastern Baltic region in any detail. I present herein the maps of only a few ornaments (figs. 3–4), with the purpose of demonstrating the enormous diversity of their

Fig. 3. Distribution of some types of Roman Iron Age brooches in the East Baltic region (after Moora 1938). 1- eye brooches of main and Estonian series, 2- crossbow brooches with tendril feet, 3- eye-brooches of Prussian series, 4- ladder brooches.

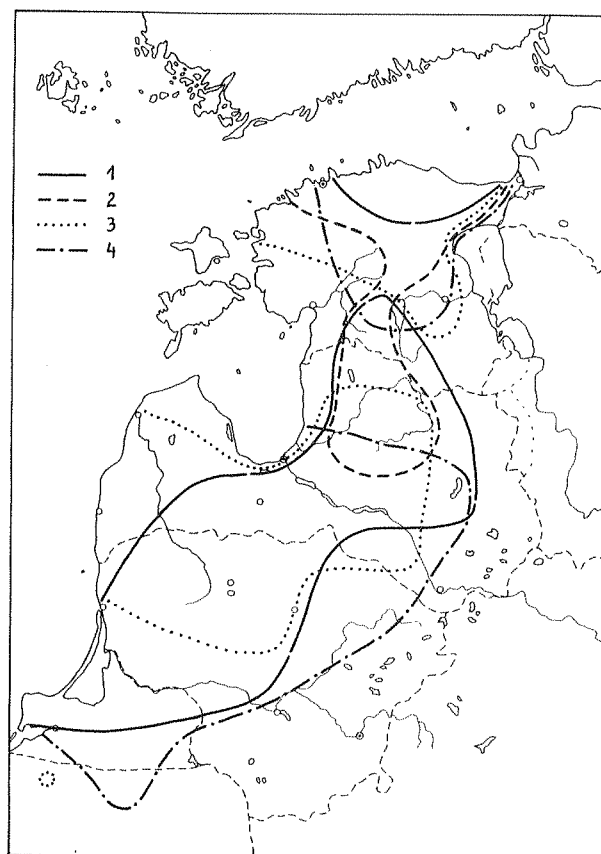


geographical distribution. One must take into consideration, however, that the majority of metal artefacts of the Roman Iron Age come from graves, i.e. this does not offer an objective picture of material culture. When analysing this intentionally composed cultural heritage, one has to consider peculiarities in the religious, social, political, etc. behaviour of elite groups. For instance, if the peripheral groups tried to signalise solidarity and close connections with those in the core, they evidently did so by using symbols of material culture in both life and in the afterlife. One may only imagine how such strategies could change the 'real' picture (depending purely on the location and economic activity of 'workshops') in the distribution of commodities, ornaments and weapons.

### Conclusions

As we saw, neither pottery traditions, burial customs nor metal artefacts have any direct connection with spoken languages. Of course, all those traits of material culture vary over space and time; yet, this is a regional and temporal – and not an ethnic – variability. Archaeologists can easily distinguish between the material remains of culture, to say, either of Scandinavian or East-Baltic origin, either of Bronze or Iron Age; at the same time, they are unable to establish how many and what languages were spoken by people living in those areas at those times. Language – although often used in the maintenance of ethnic and group identities – hardly created such an identity independently and in isolation (Brather 2004, 153).

**Fig. 4.** Distribution of some types of Roman Iron Age rings in the East Baltic region (after Moora 1938). 1- neck-rings with trumpet-shaped ends, 2- neck- and finger-rings with plate-shaped ends, 3- neck-rings with thickening ends, 4- neck-rings with mushroom-shaped ends.



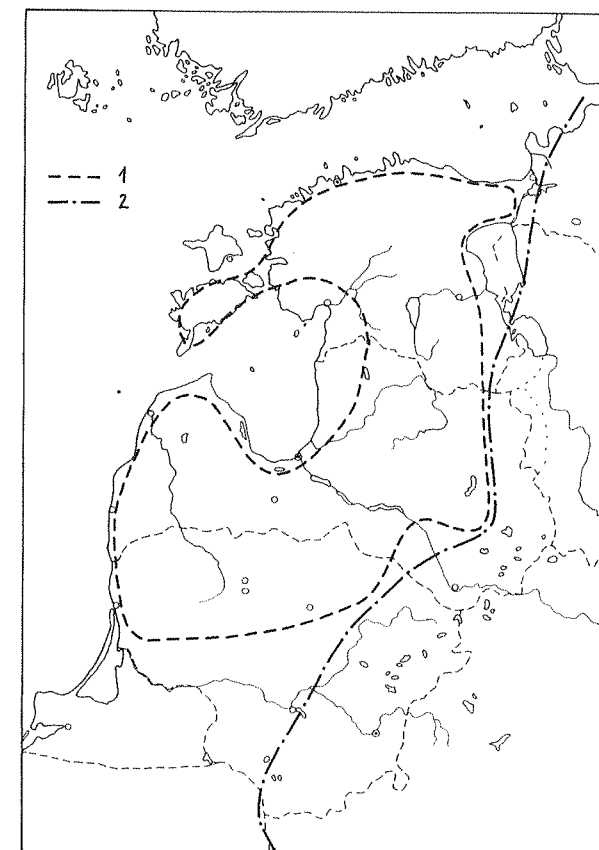
All aspects of material culture develop under different laws, at different speeds and over different regions, as do languages and social (ethnic) identities. The breaks and innovations in these fields of culture are usually not synchronous, and they cannot be connected with each other in a causal manner. What archaeologists do when distinguishing 'archaeological cultures' is that they cut off one time horizon, one geographical area, one set of artefacts from this all-embracing development, which is called human culture. 'Archaeological cultures' are thus deeply artificial and often misleading formations, hardly appropriate in any prehistoric study.

It is evident that the mapping of all such cultural traits as done above is the mapping of differences in human behaviour (see also: Anfinset 2003). Yet it is possible

to map interactions of different kind between human groups?

When mapping the settlement pattern, economic and social relations of the Roman Iron Age in the eastern Baltic, for instance, one can see that the main portion of this region – characterised otherwise by an enormous amount of cultural differences – now looks very uniform (fig. 5). In the distribution area of stone graves, barrows and pit graves with stone enclosures, one can speak of the settlement pattern consisting mostly of single farms that subsisted through the cultivation of permanent fields, while the socio-religious strategy was characterised by the circumstance that only one part of society was buried in the graves. A sharp contrast is observable on the eastern border of this region: archaeological material reflecting the rela-

**Fig. 5.** Distribution of settlement pattern, economic and social relations in the East Baltic region during the Roman Iron Age. 1- area of single farms, cultivation of permanent fields and monumental graves; 2- western border of East-European communities which subsisted on mixed farming and foraging, and did not build above-ground graves.



tions just described are completely absent in eastern Lithuania, eastern Latvia and south-eastern Estonia. It seems that there has been a rather essential cultural, social, communicative and probably also linguistic border. Corresponding groups settled in different territories and used different ecological niches, which made interaction – both contacts and resistance – possible.

A rather essential border (in the distribution of ceramics and graves and in assemblages of grave goods) also crossed this central Baltic region north of the Daugava River (compare figs. 1–4). This border reflects cultural differences between groups with similar social strategies, and one may think here of the competition for the same territory and ecological-economical niche. This border was already in more or less the same location in the Early Metal

Age, and it remained there later, slowly moving northwards to the line it occupied between the Estonians and Latgallians according to the first written sources. It is clear, on the one hand, that the Finno-Ugrian (Balto-Finnic) – Indo-European (Baltic) language border had to lie somewhere; on the other hand – was it really a language border in those times? It probably was; nevertheless, one must take into consideration that here, too, cultural differences – pottery, graves, burial customs and assemblages of grave goods – primarily indicated differences in the ideologies of different (elite) groups, as was also the case elsewhere in the East Baltic region. Probably it was just due to the sharp and relatively impenetrable language border – located north of the Daugava River – that the differences between two neighbouring



groups (the southern *tarands* and northern barrows) became more clearly visible than the other borders between the other groups (with more related languages), which were by no means so straight-

forward and clear. This means, in other words, that at least some major linguistic borders, if they were stable over longer periods of time, might also be visible in the archaeological evidence.

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## THE ARCHAEOLOGY OF GROUP: FROM SITUATIONAL CONSTRUCT TO ETHNIC GROUP

Mindaugas Bertasius

In Lithuania there is a prevailing standpoint that equates groups of archaeological sites with historical tribes. Terms like "tribal" and "ethnic", which are common in our archaeological literature, are to a certain extent abstractions – they say nothing about the long process of the evolution of social structures from family to nation. In different times we discover different expressions of social identity. Eventually other forms of identity developed – for instance cultural and ethnic identity. The ethnic meaning is one but not the only meaning for many opportunities that suggest the diffusion of material culture, reflected in the archaeological material. The archaeological material mostly represents social identity, but not ethnic identity. Wealth, the objects of the elite – marks of value – all of these are components of social identity. Grave goods mostly represent the social identity of individuals, families or groups.

The example for the material under discussion comes from central Lithuania, where a group of archaeological sites appeared since the 2<sup>nd</sup>–3<sup>rd</sup> centuries A.D. Access to water and environmental conditions predetermined human activities. It was only from the Late Migration period that there developed some traits connected with ethnicity.

*Key words*: group, social, ethnic, identity, central Lithuania.

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Long theoretical discussions have continued for some decades in world archaeology, meanwhile they have left few perceptible traces in publications by Lithuanian archaeologists. It has aptly been remarked that Lithuanian archaeology could be referred to as "necro-archaeology", as its interest mostly concentrates on burial investigations, but any settlement was investigated completely (Žulkus 1997, 14). Burial grounds have been investigated by the same model, which I consider to be aged model.

This model is like philately – the gathering of archaeological items, mostly grave goods, remains the main objective. Such collection generates heaps of artefacts in museums, or a certain set of information – some descriptive texts in the proceedings of Lithuanian scientific institutions.

But what next? More collections of philatelic nature? Then frequent wars, (our East Baltic region is accustomed to centuries of war), empire-building or revolutions – and some archaeological materials are lost. Then a new generation of archaeologists hurries to gather a new collection...

Here one might discuss a broad field of theoretical discourse, but I would like to turn my attention to some details concerning the structure of social groups. In this case I have in mind the task of interpreting the archaeological material. There are many methods that can be used to solve this problem: theoretical discussions, analytical methods for precise dating, and statistical methods for the representative generalization of results – all of these can be applied for the dependable reconstruction of prehistoric communi-