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FROM AESTII TO ESTI. CONNECTIONS BETWEEN THE WESTERN LITHUANIAN GROUP AND THE AREA OF DISTRIBUTION OF *TARAND*-GRAVES

Rasa Banytė-Rowell and Anna Bitner-Wróblewska

The name *Aestii* was first used by Tacitus to describe the peoples dwelling on the amber coast of the Baltic Sea. As the centuries passed, this name was transformed into *Haistii* and *Esti* (*Eistr, Eistir*) in the Middle Ages. The question arises as to whether the ethnonym and/or the peoples to which it refers moved along the coast of the sea. The present authors wish to compare the written sources with archaeological data and look for any possible connections between the areas of distribution of the western Lithuanian stone-circle-graves and the *tarand*-graves. It turns out that there are a significant number of similarities both in *sacrum* and *profanum*. Lithuanian graves with stone constructions are very reminiscent of the *tarand*-enclosures from the Finnic environment. There are also elements of the costume that are common to both areas, such as open-work brooches and rosette pins/brooches, as well as several examples of mutual connections (snake-headed finger rings, fibulae A.133 and imitations thereof).

Key words: Western Lithuanian stone-circle graves, *tarand*-graves, *Aestii*, similarities in *sacrum* and *profanum*.

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Introduction

"Culture and material culture", the subject of the first Baltic Archaeological Seminar (BASE), devotes its attention to a central problem of archaeology, namely how we interpret past material culture. Among different aspects of the study of people and societies in the past, the problem of ethnic identity remains a key focus of archaeological interest (see Shennan 1989; 1991). As we enter the twenty-first century we have almost abandoned the peccadilloes typical of archaeology in the first half of the twentieth century, whereby archaeology was understood not as means of exploring the pre-history of an area but as a study of the proto-history of the ancestors of a certain ethnic group, which was believed to have created the 'state' that lat-er came to stand on that territory. Today political circumstances no longer require us to exaggerate or deliberately underestimate the contribution of "alien" influences on culture in the eastern Baltic region.

The authors of this article have chosen induction as a method to obtain a general picture of connections in the region in question, comparing archaeological evidence with the ethnic information about *Aesti*, *Esti* and *Eistir* to be found in the written historical sources (fig. 1).

The name *Aesti* [*Aestiorum gentes*] was first mentioned by Tacitus in "Germania" (1st century AD) to describe the peoples dwelling along the amber coast of the Baltic Sea (Tacitus, Germania, 45: 2–4). They have been identified as the inhabitants of Samland and the western Lithuanian coast (Kunkel 1943, col. 1815; Okulicz 1986,

14–18; Nowakowski 1995, 81). This name appeared in the written sources for centuries. In the sixth century it appears in Cassiodorus as *H[a]esti*, and in a letter of the Ostrogoth king Theodoric the Great (Cassiodorus, Variae, V: 2). However, there is an opinion that asserts that the "Variae" is more an exercise in Latin stylistics than a source of information about the time when the author was writing (see Helm 1954, col. 916; Nowakowski 1995, 83).

Fig. 1. The name *Aestii, Esti, Eistir* in written sources.

Tacitus	1st c. AD	Aesti
Cassiodorus	6th c. AD	H[a]esti
Iordanes	6th c. AD	Aesti
Wulfstan	9th c. AD	Esti
Adam Bremensis	11th c. AD	Haisti
Scandinavian sources	12th –14th c. AD	Eistr, Eistir

However, the same sixth century brought us another written source that mentions the name under discussion here, namely the "Getica" of Jordanes. He mentioned the *Aesti* [*Aestiorum natio*] (Jordanes, Getica, V: 36, 5–8) who settled by the Baltic Sea to the east of *Vidivarii* located at the mouth of the Vistula (Okulicz 1992, 140)[1]. After several centuries the name *Esti* [*to, mid Estum*] appeared in the ninth-century account of Wulfstan (Alfred's Orosius, 14–15). He wrote of the *Esti* who lived to the east of the river Vistula (Labuda 1960, 51–58), while in the eleventh century Adam of Bremen mentioned the *Haisti* [*Aestland*] as living on the south coast of the Baltic Sea (Adam Bremensis, Lib. IV, cap. XII). In the Scandinavian written sources from the twelfth–fourteenth centuries we find the names *Eistr, Eistir, Eistland*, and *Aistland* appears in "Guta Saga", and also in a history of Gotland written in the 13th

century (Fritzner 1886, 315; Lexicon Poeticum 1913–1916, 103; Bammersberger & Karaliūnas 1998, 43). In this case it clearly refers to the inhabitants of Estonia. The question arises as to whether the ethnonym or the people(s) to which it refers moved along the coast of the sea.

The main aim of this paper is to compare the written sources with the relevant archaeological sources and look for connections between the amber coast of the Baltic Sea and the Finnic lands in the eastern Baltic. We would like to concentrate on connections between the western Lithuanian Group and the group of *tarand*-graves in the time of Tacitus and later, in the first centuries AD (fig. 2).

The term West Lithuanian Group refers to the phenomenon of burial practice and material culture from the coastal area of what is now Lithuania and south-western Latvia (Tautavičius 1980, 81; Michelbertas 1986, 27–41; Vasks 1997, 49–51, 62–63). What we call the *tarand*-graves group was widespread in northern Latvia, Estonia and southern Finland (Moora 1938, fig. 90; Laul 1985; Vasks 1997, 57–61, 68–69).

Burial customs

One of the most important aspects of any society remains its burial customs, which reflect the sphere of the *sacrum*. The burial customs of the West Lithuanian Group are unique in Lithuania of that time, as is illustrated by the traditional full name for this archaeological phenomenon – "the West Lithuanian cultural area of stone-circle graves". Although the "conventional borders" of this area extend further to the north into the south-western coastal area of Latvia, flat burial sites with stone enclosures are mostly known in what is now coastal region of Lithuania, bounded by
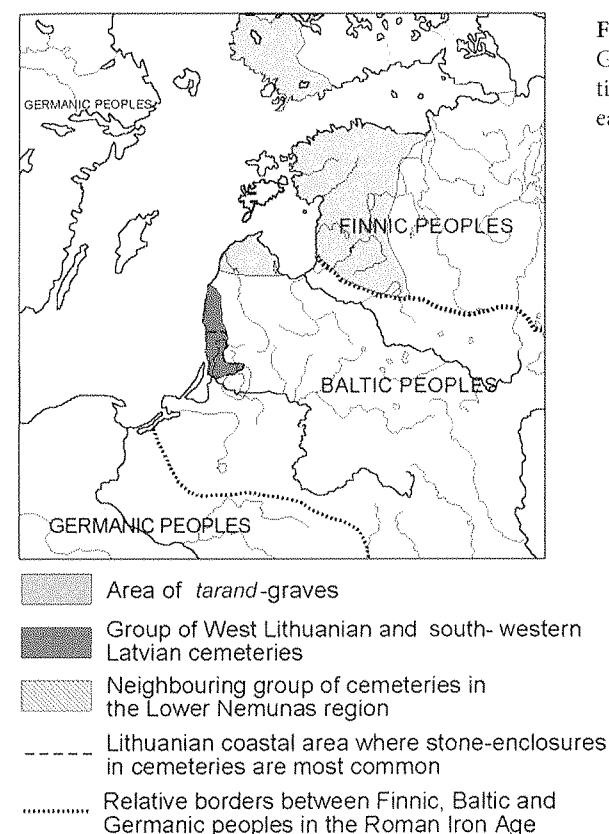

Fig. 2. The western Lithuanian Group and the area of distribution of the *tarand*-graves in the eastern Baltic region.

Area of *tarand*-graves

Group of West Lithuanian and south-western Latvian cemeteries

Neighbouring group of cemeteries in the Lower Nemunas region

- - - - Lithuanian coastal area where stone-enclosures in cemeteries are most common

·········· Relative borders between Finnic, Baltic and Germanic peoples in the Roman Iron Age

the Minija Delta in the south, the Šventoji (Heilige Aa) River in the north and the upper Jūra River area to the east (fig. 2). Stones are not found in the cemeteries of southwestern Latvia, probably because of the difficulties of finding them in more obvious quantities in this area (see Wahle 1928, 37).

The people of the western Lithuanian coastlands were buried in this way during the first five or six centuries A.D.: the dead were not cremated, but were instead buried in lengthy oblongish pits, the earthen fill of which was complemented with charred material and ashes. The skeletons of the deceased have mostly disintegrated. Burial orientation was generally on a nearly north–south axis. The distinguishing feature of burial customs in western Lithuania in these times is horse sac-

rifices and burials. The burial places were marked or surrounded by round or oval, and more rarely oblong stone enclosures that were connected to one another in different ways. Thus, in the plans of western Lithuanian cemeteries we see a network of stone constructions (fig. 3). The stone enclosures were quite often built in a frame of two or three layers, where the bigger field stones were carefully chosen for the upper layer. Depending on the age or also on the status of the buried individuals, the diameter of grave stone circles varied from approximately 1 m to 3 to 4, or even 6 metres; the length/width ratio of the oval stone frames varied from 0.5×1 m to 2×4 m. Some of the latest burial places were marked by a compact stone "pavement", the construction of which may have led to the loss of the framework of larger field
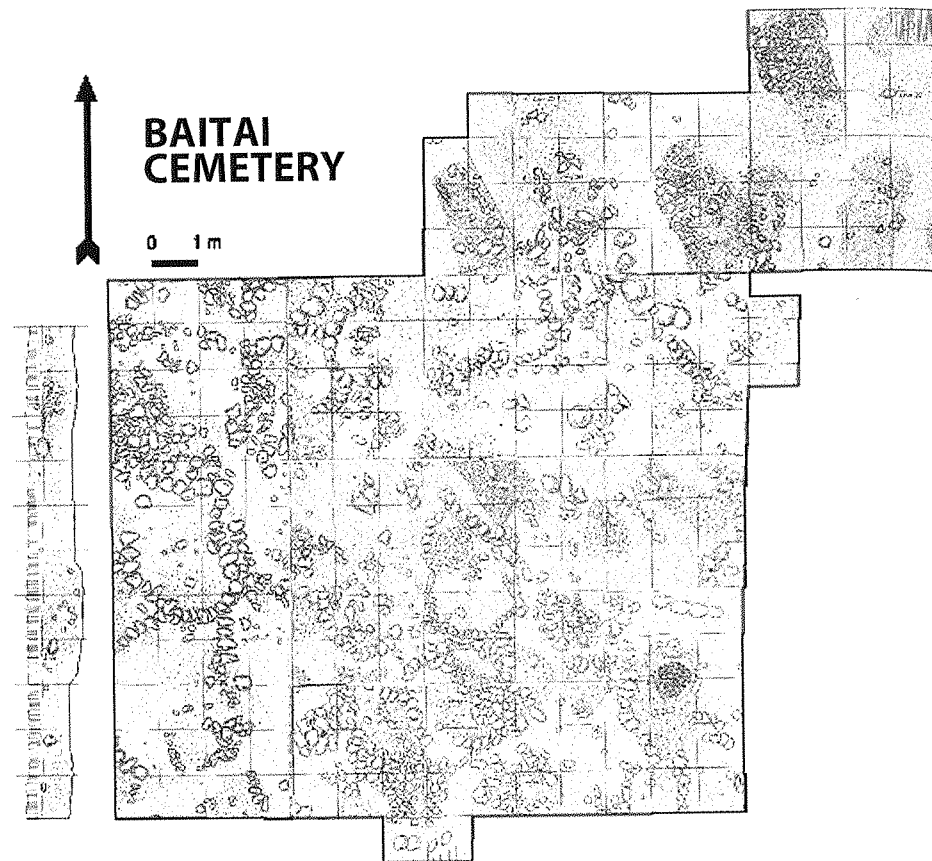
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[1] Jordanes mentions that the southern neighbours of the *Aestii* were the *Acatziri*, one of the Hunnic tribes. For a discussion and comments concerning this aspect of Jordanes' work, see Okulicz 1986, 15.

Fig. 3. Upper layer of stone enclosures at Baitai cemetery (Klaipėda district, Lithuanian coastal region).

Fig. 4. Stone enclosures at Ilmandu cemetery (Estonia) (according to Lang 1995).

1- granite stone, 2- limestone slab, 3- limestone slab standing upright, 4- wall stone, 5- limestone shingle, 6- destroyed area of grave.

stones. Such a gradual degeneration of the earlier more accurate stone constructions was also noticed in the *tarand*-cemeteries dated to the Late Roman Age – stones from the *tarand*-grave walls begin to differ slightly from other stones (Laul 1985, 74–76, 80). In the western Lithuanian coastal area the infill of the grave pit also frequently consists of a few or more stones, which may lie in a disorderly fashion at various levels or on the surface of a grave.

Significant changes in burial customs took place in the coastal area of Lithuania in the time of Tacitus, when Early-Iron-Age barrows with multiple burials came to be replaced by flat cemeteries with individual graves. This must have reflected great social changes in the structure of society, which began to prefer individual burials to large family barrows. There was also a significant change in the construction of graves, as has been described above. There are different opinions about the origin of western Lithuanian stone constructions that have been dated to the Roman Period. Harri Moora (1938, 599–603), Marija Alseikaitė-Gimbutienė (1946, 35, 36), and recently Pranas Kulikauskas (1968, 54), have stressed the role of earlier traditions and the impact of Early Iron Age barrows with stones. Recently, Vladas Žulkus (1995, 77–89, 106-107; 2004, 18–19) has suggested the impact of Scandinavian influences, probably from Gotland.

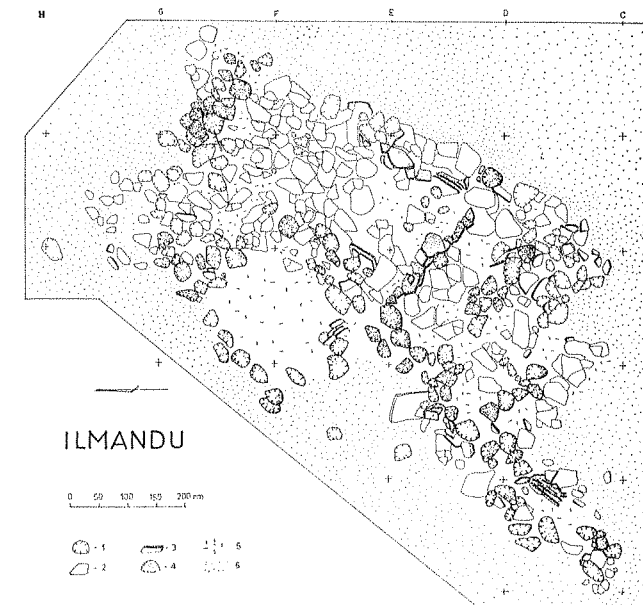In our opinion, none of these hypotheses explains the appearance of stone enclosures in western Lithuania in the first century AD. The similarities between the latter and the *tarand*-enclosures of the Finnic area seem to be much closer than any of the possible influences mentioned above (see Bitner-Wróblewska 2002, 75–76). When we compare the plans of western Lithuanian cemeteries (fig. 3), such as those at Tūbaisiai (Rimantienė 1968), Schernen/Šernai (Bezzenberger 1892), Baitai (Banytė-Rowell 2001a) or any other, with the plans of Estonian *tarand*-graves such as Virunuka (Laul 1965), Jäbara (Schmiedehelm 1955), Paali (Laul 2001, fig. 6) or any other, the similarities appear to be obvious (fig. 4). The connections are especially clear when one examines the early *tarand*-graves from Kõmsi (Jaanits et al. 1982, fig. 140) or Tõugu IIB and IIC (Lang 2000, 100–115), or the Kurevere cemetery in Saaremaa (Jaanits et al. 1982, 177, fig. 114) which have been dated to the Pre-Roman Iron Age that directly precedes the appearance of western Lithuanian stone circle graves[2].

Tarand-graves replaced the so-called stone-cist graves (*Steinkistengräber*) of the Late-Bronze- and Early-Iron Age (Laul 1985, 71–72; Mandel 1995, 111–112). Elements of their construction resemble those of Early Iron Age barrows from the coastal area of Lithuania. These common features could be the result of "genetically programmed evolution" in several areas of the Baltic region at the same time, because of the similar requirements of that society, which also touched on the sphere of the *sacrum*.

We realise, however, that there are also differences between the burial customs of these two areas. Inhumation graves remain typical of the western Lithuanian Group, while cremation burials were generally placed within *tarand*-enclosures. The most significant difference appears in the presence of closed assemblages in western Lithuanian graves (comp. LAP 1968), and the lack of such in *tarand*-graves, where the grave goods were scattered around the stone construction (comp. Schmiedehelm 1955; Laul 2001).

[2] The authors would like to thank Valter Lang for drawing our attention to this aspect during constructive discussion at the BASE 1 meeting.

It seems that in the western Lithuanian Group, influences from the central European *Barbaricum*, with their tendency towards individual burials with grave goods, had merged with north-eastern influences from Estonia.

Material

The question arises as to whether similarities in *sacrum* between the western Lithuanian Group and Estonian *tarand*-graves are combined with the similarities in *profanum*, as for example, elements of costume. Studies of costume and its elements appear to be the best for such research, as costume demonstrates a way in which society signifies its ethnicity or political affiliation. It should be underlined that each study of material must be based on sound chronology. It is impossible to study societies and the connections between them without having some knowledge of when those contacts took place.

The Estonian material that dates from the Roman and Early Migration Period, the time which interests us here, provides no possibility to construct a modern periodisation. The reason for this is the lack of closed assemblages there. In this case the synchronisation of Estonian materials with well-dated grave complexes from the lands of Balts or from the *Barbaricum* in general, may provide the only solution to our dilemma.

Returning to the main subject of our paper, we would like to emphasise that there are a number of ornaments which offer insight into connections between the western Lithuanian Group and Estonian *tarand*-graves during the first centuries A.D. Here the authors wish to present several examples. Before embarking on the analysis proper, we would like to point out that in our research we follow the significant work done by Marta Schmiedehelm, the well-known Estonian archaeologist,

who studied *tarand*-graves in northern Estonia and noted the connections between them and material from the southeastern Baltic coast (Schmiedehelm 1931; 1955, 209–211). It is remarkable that in the 1930s these connections seemed to be related mainly to the problem of "der germanische Einfluß" (see Moora 1932, 45–46), while the search for similarities in archaeological data from the different Baltic states, which had attracted the attention of scholars at that time, remains relevant today (a good example of this is the outstanding work of Moora 1938).

Open-work brooches and rosette pins are a good example of ornaments common to western Lithuania and Estonia. They are ornaments whose forms, despite local variations, display very close proximity to the sense of style of people living in the western Lithuanian coastland and Estonia. Locally-produced, round openwork brooches or pins were popular in both regions in the third century (Michelbertas 1986, 133). Western Lithuanian (in the broader sense – the coastal region and the Nemunas river area) openwork brooches/pins were created independently of Samland influences. This is important when we remember that Lithuanian stone-circle graves are regarded as peripheral to the culture of the western Balts, which during the first half of the early Iron Age or early Roman period (first–second centuries) was influenced greatly by the Dollkeim-Kovrovo Culture of the Samland Peninsula (Nowakowski 1996, 83–86; Bitner-Wróblewska 2002, 74–76).

The first impulse for creating these ornaments was provided by provincial Roman brooches (Ginters 1936, 55, 58–59, fig. 5; Ambroz 1966, 32, fig. 14: 17, 15: 5; Michelbertas 1972, 92, fig. 24; 1986 122; 1998, 430). However, the East-Baltic openwork brooches and pins are not only interesting as examples of imitations of the Roman provincial style (fig. 5: 1–3). Their most impressive aspect is their

Fig. 5. Openwork brooches found in western Lithuanian cemeteries (2, 3, 5, 6, 8) and similar examples from *tarand*-graves in Estonia (1, 4, 7): 1- Kõnnu (according to Laul 2001), 2- Stragnai (LNM inv. no. AR 38: 1303), 3- Žviliai (according to Vaitkunskienė 1999), 4- Siksali (according to Laul 2001), 5- Lazdininkai, grave 7 (according to Michelbertas 2000), 6- Pleškučiai-Pangėsai (according to Bezzenberger 1914), 7- Vagula (according to Laul 2001), 8- Lazdininkai, grave 2 (according to Butkus & Kanarskas 1992).
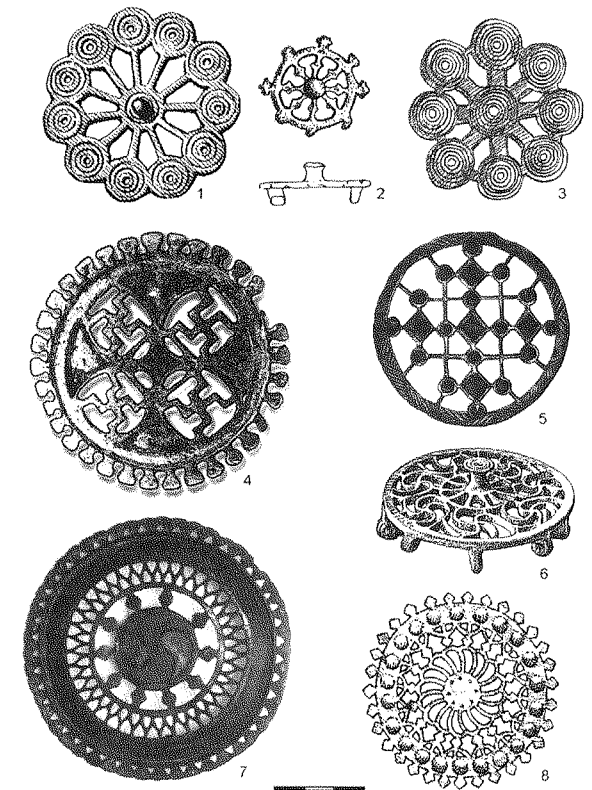
creators' ability to combine details of local taste and some elements mostly beloved of the world of the Germanic peoples (e.g. the swastika on the Siksali and Pleškučiai-Pangėsai brooches, see fig. 5: 4, 6) on the basis of the "classical" Roman shape (Laul 2001, 112, fig. 42: 1; Bezzenberger 1914, 150, fig. 30; Ginters 1936, 58–59,61, fig. 7). However, the local styles of both regions also influenced one another. This leads us to "the most Finnish Lithuanian" openwork brooches, which were found in the Lazdininkai cemetery. The first (fig. 5: 5) is an enamel brooch from grave 7 (Michelbertas 2000, 57–60, fig. 1, also the figure on the cover page). It is unique in its Lithuanian context, not only because of its enamel decoration (which is common enough in the area of distribution of *tarand*-graves), but also because of the cruciform element of its openwork

ornamentation. It consists of a rhomboid middle part which ends in four round plates. This element was very popular in Finnic jewellery in the Roman period, a "pure" example of which is the cross-shaped brooch from Virunuka (Jaanits et al. 1982, pl. IX: above right). Another brooch from Lazdininkai grave 2 (fig. 5: 8) (Butkus & Kanarskas 1992, 85, figure on the front cover) has no enamel covering, but its complicated openwork ornament reveals the same impression of movement as does the shape of the enamel brooch from Vagula (fig. 5: 7) (Jaanits et al. 1982, pl. IX: above left; Laul 2001, 112, fig. 42: 4). Round openwork brooches and pins are mostly found in western Lithuanian graves in the first half of the third century to the mid-third century. These ornaments are reliable enough as a chronological indicator in western Lithuanian gravesites;
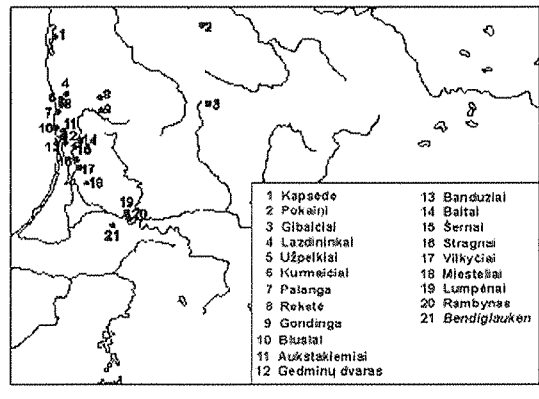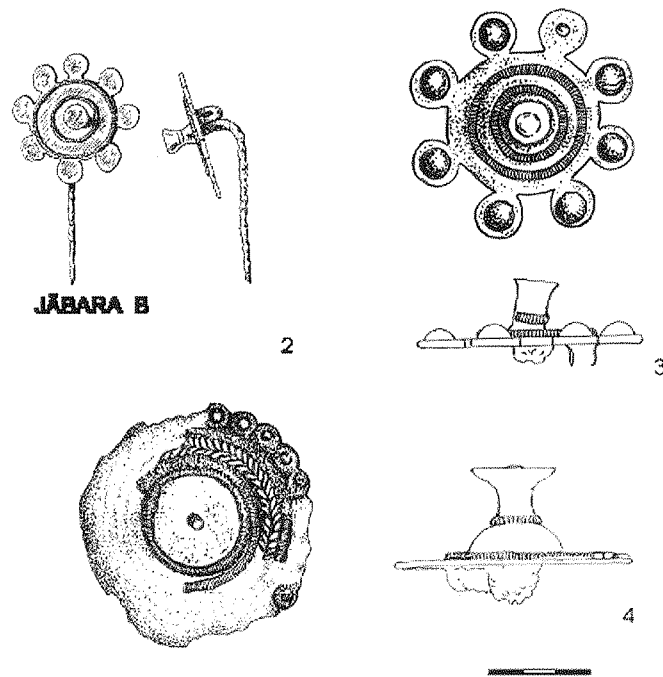
Fig. 6. 1- distribution of rosette pins or brooches in Lithuania and southern Latvia. 2–4- rosette tutuli pins: 2- Jäbara, Estonia (according to Schmiedehelm 1955), 3, 4- Stragnai, Lithuania (LNM inv. no. AR 38: 925, AR 38: 291).

1 Kapsėdė	13 Bandužiai
2 Pokaiņi	14 Baitai
3 Gibaičiai	15 Šernai
4 Lazdininkai	16 Stragnai
5 Užpelkiai	17 Vilkyčiai
6 Kurmaičiai	18 Miesteliai
7 Palanga	19 Lumpėnai
8 Reketė	20 Rambynas
9 Gondinga	21 Bendiglauken
10 Blusiai	
11 Aukštakiemiai	
12 Gedminų dvaras	

JÄBARA B

2

3

4

Fig. 7. Distribution of rings of Beckmann type 40 and analogous types.

■ Find-sites of Beckmann type 40 rings (according to Beckmann 1969; Andersson 1993; Lund Hansen 1995)

● ● Distribution of Beckmann type 40 rings and their imitations in the East Baltic Sea region.

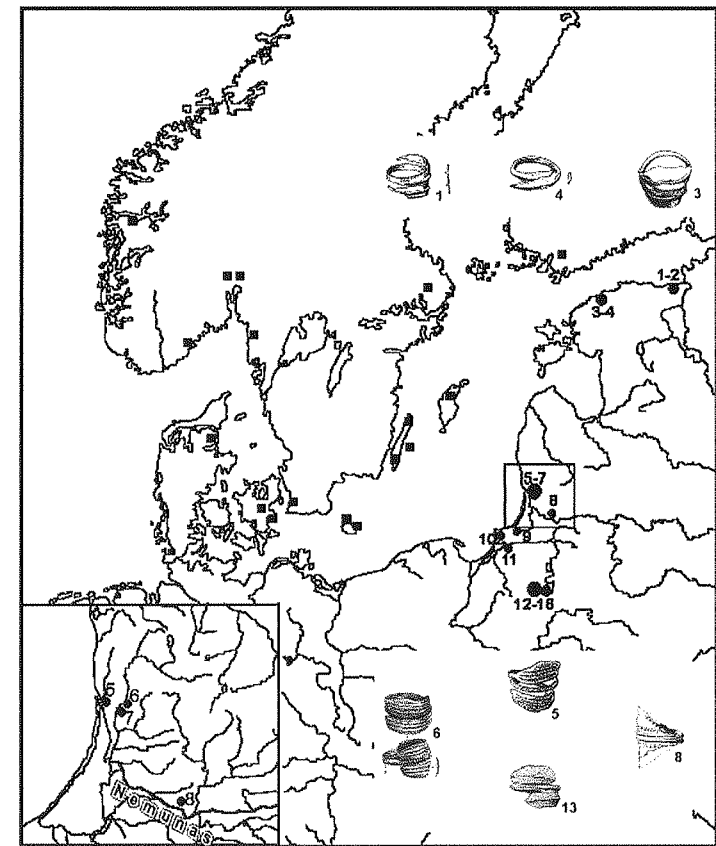|			
1 Jäbara	5 Bandužiai	9 Biezymianka (Nuskern)	12 Machary (Macharen)
2 Türsamäe	6 Baitai (Baiten)	10 Putilovo (Corjeiten)	13 Babięta (Babienten)
3 Proosa	7 Šernai (Schernen)	11 Rosenau	14 Wólka (Dietrichswalde)
4 Mõlgu-Peetri	8 Lumpėnai (Lumpöhnen)		15 Gąsior (Gonschor)
			16 Spychówko (Klein Puppen)

it could therefore be useful for correlation with similar shaped ornaments in the area of *tarand*-graves.

Rosette pins/brooches with tutuli spread in graves in the Dollkeim-Kovrovo region and western Lithuanian/south-western Latvian areas at different times. This fashion came to the Samland Peninsula at a considerably earlier time (in phase B$_2$), and had already disappeared in the third century (Nowakowski 1996, 17, 83–87). It is curious that early 1st–2nd century "Samland-form" rosette tutuli brooches have been found in Estonia at the Triigi grave site (Schmiedehelm 1955, 160, fig. 43: 2; Jaanits et al. 1982, fig. 152; Lõugas & Selirand 1989, 301), but they have not hitherto been known in Lithuania. This probably means that direct contacts between the coasts of Samland and Estonia existed in the early Roman period. Meanwhile, the rosette pin found at Jäbara B (fig. 6: 2) (Schmiedehelm 1955, 77–78, fig. 17: 7) is similar to finds from south-western Latvia and western Lithuania (fig. 6: 1), where such types of pins and brooches became part of the "uniform" from the mid-third century among wealthy women's jewellery (fig. 6: 3–4). Some versions of the latter were found in graves dated to the turn of the fourth–fifth centuries, but the main group of rosette pins and brooches were an exclusive ornament for ladies in the second half of the third and the first half of the fourth century (Michelbertas 1986, 122; Banytė 1999; Nowakowski 1999, 111–112). The inhabitants of western Lithuania began to make rosette pins when open-work round pins/brooches were going out of fashion (this conclusion is based on the analysis done for a dissertation, see Banytė-Rovell 2001b, 20–22, 45–46).

Apart from the number of common costume elements in both of the areas in question, there are also several examples of different aspects of mutual connections between the western Lithuanian Group and the *tarand*-graves. The latter functioned as an intermediary in the dissemination of inter-regional stylistic novelties in the eastern Baltic Sea region, including Estonia. This finds good confirmation in the case of snake-headed finger-rings (Banytė-Rowell, in print). Four spiral rings with flattened

ends have been found in the cemeteries of western Lithuania (Baitai grave 31, Šernai grave 67, Lumpėnai grave 9, Bandužiai grave 74) (Banytė-Rowell 2000, 38, fig. 7: 23; Bezzenberger 1892, pl. IX: 11; 1909a, 139, fig. 135; Stankus 1995a, 69, fig. 61: 17; 1995b, 89–92, fig. 4). Three of them were made of silver, and one was bronze. The rings are reminiscent of Beckmann type 40, which is regarded as a stylised and simplified variation on rings with animal (snake) ends (types 39–42) (Beckmann 1969, 49; fig. 21; pl. 2). Scandinavian Beckmann Type 40 rings appear in phase C_1 and were also used during phase C_2 (the end of the second, and the third century). Although all of the *Schlangenkopffingerringe* find sites are concentrated in Denmark, whereas the stylised form of this style – Beckmann type 40 – is broadly distributed further to the north, across the rest of Scandinavia (fig. 7). The northernmost find sites are in Norway and Finland (Isokylä) (Lund Hansen 1995, 208–211, fig. 8: 2; Andersson 1993, 86). A number of rings have been found in Estonia (Tamla 1977, 58–59, fig. 6; Deemant 1980, 360–361, pl. IV: 10; Schmiedehelm 1955, 69, fig. 14: 9; Moora 1932, 34, 40, fig. 24: 13; Lang 1996, 177), along the Gulf of Finland in the north of the country[3] (Mõigu-Peetri, Proosa, Lagedi XIVA, Saha D, Rae I, Jäbara C, Türsamäe)[4]. Bronze rings of type 40 from the Estonian gravesites of Jäbara and Türsamäe, like the gold ones, have an elongated middle edge at their ends and end in narrowed shoots. In terms of form, the "Lithuanian" rings are more distant from the classical gold rings than the "Estonian"

ones. The "Lithuanian" versions of Beckmann's type 40 reflected the same rank of prestige among the Balts[5] as the gold rings do in Denmark and elsewhere in Scandinavia.

On the other hand, it should also be said that material from Lithuanian graves shows that in the Roman Period not all strands of cultural interface between the Finnic centres in Estonia and western Balt centres in Samland and the Mazurian Lakeland extended through the Lithuanian coastal area. Or, to be more precise, we should realise that the process of these cultural connections might have been more complicated – with the western Lithuanian area as one of the main intermediate factors, but not the only one. Such a situation may have taken place in the case of brooches Almgren 133 and their imitations. Fibulae A.133 feature the hinge-like construction (*Scharnierkonstruktion*), a wide, band-like bow and trapeze head-plate (Almgren 1923, 68–69, pl. VI: 133). They occur in large numbers in the Mazurian Lakeland, in the area of the so-called Bogaczewo Culture (Nowakowski 1991, 54, fig. 5). This ornament is regarded as an ethnic indicator of women's costume from the Mazurian Lakeland. Based on close assemblages and correspondent analysis, A.133 brooches are dated to phase B_{2b} and the beginning of B_2/C_1, which corresponds with the first half of the second century and the beginning of the second half of this century (Nowakowski 1995, 38–41; see also 1998).

Single finds of the brooches in question are recorded outside the main concen-

Fig. 8. Distribution of A.133 brooches and imitations thereof, fibulae with hinge-like construction and triangular foot.
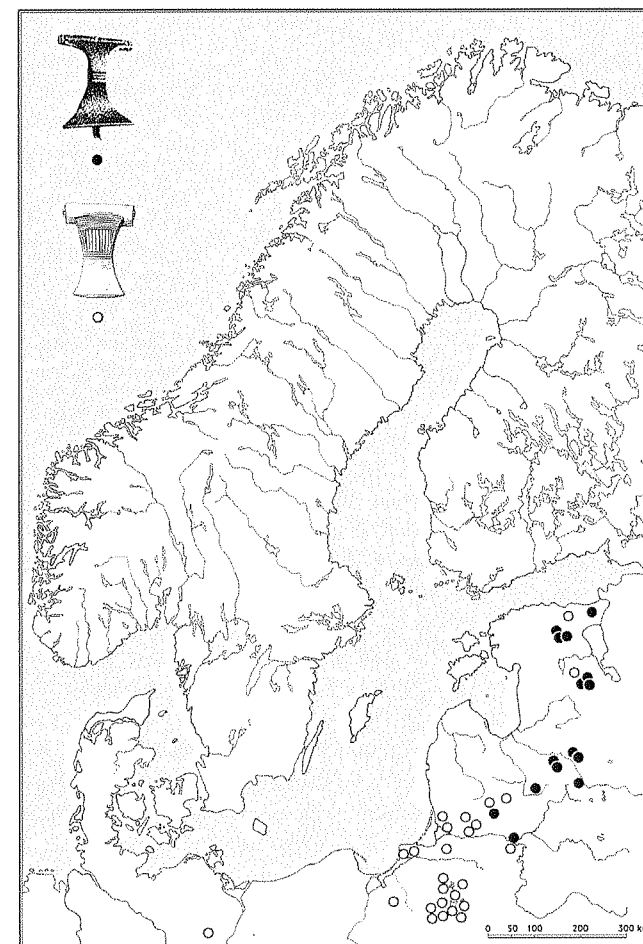
tration area[6], in Lithuania and Estonia[7], among other places. Several specimens of A.133 fibulae are known from Lithuania – from Marvelė, grave 58[8], Central Lithuanian Group and from the western Lithuanian Group (Labatakiai – Moora 1938, 79, fig. 18: 2; Barzdūnai, Vilkyčiai[9]), among others, as well as Karpiškiai in northern Lithuania (Moora 1938, 79, fig. 18: 3). There were also two specimens found in

Estonia, one at an unknown site (Moora 1938, 79, footnote 2) and another at Truuta (Laul 2001, fig. 45: 4).

Oscar Almgren pointed out that the Mazurian A.133 brooches appeared to be a source of inspiration for some other fibulae with hinge-like constructions (Almgren 1923, 68). There is a group of so-called *Scharnierfibeln mit dreieckigen Fuß* (fibulae with hinge-like construction

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[3] There are also several rings of the type in question in central Estonia – personal communication from Valter Lang.

[4] The authors would like to thank Valter Lang for information about several rings that are only mentioned in the literature.

[5] It is worth pointing out that silver is not common in the Baltic environment, and gold is particularly rare here.

[6] A.133 brooches have been found as far to the west of the Bogaczewo Culture area as Zwierzewo in the Wielbark Culture territory (Bezzenberger 1909b, 71, fig. 38) and Berlin (Nowakowski 1995, 38; earlier literature ibidem).

[7] Some of them are a certain transformation of A.133-type brooches, for example without the head-plate, such as items from Barzdūnai and Truuta.

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[8] Unpublished materials from the excavations of A. Astrauskas and M. Bertašius, whom the authors would like to thank very much for the information they provided. The A.133 brooch found at Marvelė had been noted by W. Nowakowski (1995, 40).

[9] Both Barzdūnai/Barsduhnen and Vilkyčiai/Wilkieten – information from the H. Jankuhn Archive. The Jankuhn Archive, housed in Archäologisches Landesmuseum Schleswig, is being catalogued by a research group including C. von Carnap-Bornheim, W. Nowakowski, R. Banytė-Rowell, A. Cieśliński and M. Nowakowska.

and triangular foot) occurring in the eastern Baltic (Moora 1929, pl. V: 7, 9; 1938, 78–80). They are recorded particularly in Latvia (Razbuķi, Sērpils, Taurkalne, unknown sites) and Estonia (Jäbara, Nurmsi, Virunuka – Laul 2001, 115, fig. 43: 1–2). Several of them are also known from central Lithuania (Kupriai, Pakuonis, unknown site near Kaunas), although not from the coastal area (fig. 8).

Conclusions

Here the authors would like to emphasise the similarities between what is now western Lithuania and Estonia in terms of both burial practice material and elements of material culture from the first centuries AD. The written sources turn our attention to the eastern Baltic zone – from the amber coast on the Samland Peninsula and western Lithuania up to northern Estonia. The archaeological sources seem to follow the same route – peoples living on the eastern coastline had been connected in different aspects of their life, whatever their ethnic origin may have been.

From the point of view of a "neutral reader", the authors of this article are presenting their own subjective point of view, which is constructed on the basis of ambiguous ancient historical sources. In the latter, we find that through the ages the ethnonym *Aestiorum gentes* referred to by Tacitus was somehow transformed into the name of *Esti (Eistr, Eistir)* in the Middle Ages. An analysis by two linguists, S. Karaliūnas and A. Bammersberger, may provide confirmation for our hypothesis. Their conclusion that the description of *Aestii* was used by Germanic neighbours to describe *all* of the inhabitants of the eastern Baltic coast from *Frischen Haff* to the Gulf of Bothnia is based on the etymological meaning of *aistio-, aisto-* (land; inhabitants of land) (Bammersberger & Karaliūnas 1998, 39, 43, 45). They sup-

posed that Tacitus most probably described the inhabitants of Samland as *Aestii*, but later the name came to be used more flexibly, and was applied to people living further north (Karaliūnas 1991; Bammersberger & Karaliūnas 1998, 39, 43, 45). It is not strange that the description *Aestii* was probably used by outsiders rather than by the inhabitants of the eastern Baltic region themselves. The problem of the different range of the name *Aestii* has also been discussed recently by W. Nowakowski (1996, 109–116).

We realise that there is always some danger in using historical sources to strengthen data from the archaeological material or in viewing data from the dubious advantage of hindsight. On the other hand, a comparison between written and archaeological sources is the only solution to discover the name of unknown peoples from eastern Baltic zone. However, recent research on ethnicity points out the flexibility and relative nature of ethnic borders (see Barth 1969). This has been tellingly summarised by Chris Goden: *The links between these different facets of identity can be judged through looking at the specific history of a region, as ethnicity arises from intersections in the similarities and differences in peoples habitus and allows one to look at how unconscious patterns of life are transformed in self-consciously used symbols. Groups are never static entities but always in the process of becoming* (Goden 1999, 96).

Examining archaeological data from the eastern Baltic region in the Roman Iron Age, we can see that the area of the so-called *tarand*-graves was not "a deep periphery" in relation to the situation of the western Balts, which could naturally be supposed to have been better, simply judging from their geographical location. The local versions of jewellery styles, and finds of goods from Roman provinces in the area of *tarand*-graves, bear witness to the strength of lines of communication leading through the *Barbaricum*, and to

how far these lines were "firmly installed" to preserve contact with the northeastern corner of the Baltic coastland. From this point of view the western Balts, as southern neighbours, did not and probably could not have blocked, or even have had the intention of blocking these communications. Therefore the contacts between the western Balts and the Baltic Finns themselves are an extraordinarily interesting object of study. The inhabitants of both regions lived with their own specific *ritus* and created their own style of dressing (to

some degree), but they also shared much in common, even in the sphere of *sacrum*.

Focusing our attention on the similarities of the Roman Iron Age archaeological material from the area of the Lithuanian coastal region and the *tarand*-graves region, we would like to understand why there were many common features between the "alien groups" of the Balts and the Baltic Finns. Material culture combined with written sources may provide good tools for such research, although more unanswered questions continue to appear.

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CROSSBOW FIBULA AS A REFLECTION OF SOCIAL STATUS AND RELATIONS

Mari-Liis Rohtla

Crossbow fibulae are discussed as one of the widespread categories of adornments in Roman and Middle Iron Age stone-graves. I will use the term *fibula* in the sense of a brooch with bow-like construction that was commonly used around the Baltic during the period. While the crossbow fibulae are mostly grave-goods, their placement in graves does not provide direct information of their other functions. Nevertheless, after analysing the distribution and origin of the different types of crossbow fibulae in Estonia and examining their different production techniques, the author arrives at the conclusion that crossbow fibulae were adornments that indicated status. The possible functions of the fibulae include their use for fastening clothing, their presentation as prestige goods and their placement in graves. Contacts with other areas around the Baltic are traceable via solitary artefacts marking direct import or the ideas of production. The majority of crossbow fibulae are considered to be local specialities.

Key words: crossbow fibula, Roman Iron Age, Migration Period, grave-goods, social status marker, production techniques of adornments.

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Introduction

The most widespread adornments found in graves of the Roman and Middle Iron Ages are brooches (fibulae), among which crossbow fibulae form one of the most distinctive groups. They are numerous and were used for a long time. Unlike other fibulae, many subtypes can be distinguished among the crossbow fibulae (table). The form and function of some of the subtypes have changed considerably over time. Their use on the eastern coast of the Baltic Sea exceeds the borders of archaeological periods, starting in the middle of the 2nd century in the Roman Iron Age and continuing in the Middle Iron Age. It should be mentioned that no crossbow fibulae that could be dated to the Roman Iron Age have been found in western Estonia. At this point it should be mentioned that crossbow fibulae have been found in several hoards and buried treasures, but the topic is left out of the present article due to the lack of thorough research in the area.

Until now there has been a lack of comprehensive analysis on crossbow fibulae. Therefore my main task in this work will be to try to give an overview of problems concerning the above-mentioned fibulae. Although relatively thorough research into Roman Iron Age fibulae have been published, including the ones of crossbow fibulae (e.g. Almgren 1923; Moora 1938), new directions and starting points have arisen in artefact research during the last decade. The attempt to interpret the aspects of past society that are not reflected in the archaeological remains – for example commercial relations, social hierarchy in prehistoric society etc. – have become the main directions (Bitner-Wróblewska 2001; Wason 1994).

The primary problem with the investigation of Estonian crossbow fibulae is their exclusive appearance in Roman Iron Age graves (fig. 1). At the same time, it sets the limits for the investigation of their possible use, as we only know of them as grave-goods. On the other hand, these sites where