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Redaktorių kolegija:

Algirdas Girininkas (*ats. redaktorius*)
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Gintautas Zabiela (*sudarytojas*)
(*Lietuvos istorijos institutas*)

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A STUDY OF HISTORICAL PORT SITES IN KURZEME BETWEEN PĀVILOSTA AND UŽAVA

JURIS URTĀNS, JĀNIS ASARIS

The geographical situation of Kurzeme with its long Baltic sea coast one of the determining factors for the development of navigation in the past. Much information about the international activities of the tribes inhabiting the territory of Latvia from the 9th AD is found in different sources, mostly in Scandinavian sagas and chronicles. These sources have been investigated since the 1930's by a succession of Latvian historians (A. Spekke (Spekke, 1937), V. Biļkins (Biļkins, 1938), A. Švābe (Švābe, 1938), E. Andersons (Andersons, 1990), A. Kursis (Kursis, 1998) etc.). To analyse the navigation M. Sams (Sams, 1939), R. Malvess (Malvess, 1928; 1942) and V. Pāvulāns (Pāvulāns, 1985) have investigated those materials much deeper. They also found that the written material about navigation of Curonians (tribe inhabiting the territory of Kurzeme in the past) is the widest one. Also archaeological findings prove activity of Curonians in international trade (Nerman, 1929; Мугуревич, 1965, с. 96; Mugurēvičs, 1992), it could not be possible without using waterways. In Latvian archaeological literature the question about roll in international trade of concrete centres and regions of Kurzeme (Grobiņa archaeological complex is the only exception) is almost absent. A. Zalsters in his publication (Zalsters, 1995) about navigation in Kurzeme tried to interconnect the written sources and archaeological materials; he put forward a hypothesis, that already before the 13th AD some inhabited sites (Lūšciems, Irbe, Košrags, Pitrags) were ports and shipyards. But the main subject of this publication was the construction of ships in the past and also places where the ships could be found in Kurzeme nowadays. A. Zalsters also touches the old

tales about navigation on the rivers Užava, Rīva and Saka and some strange figurations on the coasts of those rivers. Local people guess that those strange figurations are the wharves (Zalsters, 1988, p. 203). Also archaeologist P. Stepinš a little bit highlights the problem of localisation of harbour sites on the coast of Kurzeme (Stepinš, 1968).

Since the 8th century AD, a significant centre with a possible port site has been located in Palanga in the territory of the southern Curonians in Lithuania. The wide archaeological material from this place was analysed by Lithuanian archaeologist V. Žulkus (Žulkus, Klimka, 1989, p. 35–56). In the south-western part of Latvia in the 7th century AD and probably in later centuries, a significant trade centre was situated in Grobiņa (Fig. 1:9; here also cartography of other mentioned places). The original character of inhabitants of Grobiņa, created during centuries when in Grobiņa lived immigrants from Scandinavia, their posterity and Curonians, was the basement for trade and other activities between Grobiņa and Scandinavia (Petrenko, Urtāns, 1995, p. 18–19). Apparently, the access to the Baltic sea was through river Ālande. It is possible that in present territory of Grobiņa there was also a sea-ship harbour. The rivets for clenching of ships revetment, which were found in Grobiņa, purport the relevance of this place with ships (Nerman, 1958, p. 158). Archaeological investigation proved that since the 7th century AD, contacts with Scandinavia were realised over the Baltic sea. Also information about wreckage, found in the territory of Liepāja city, maybe shows us the place of the ancient port (Stepinš, 1968, p. 182–183).

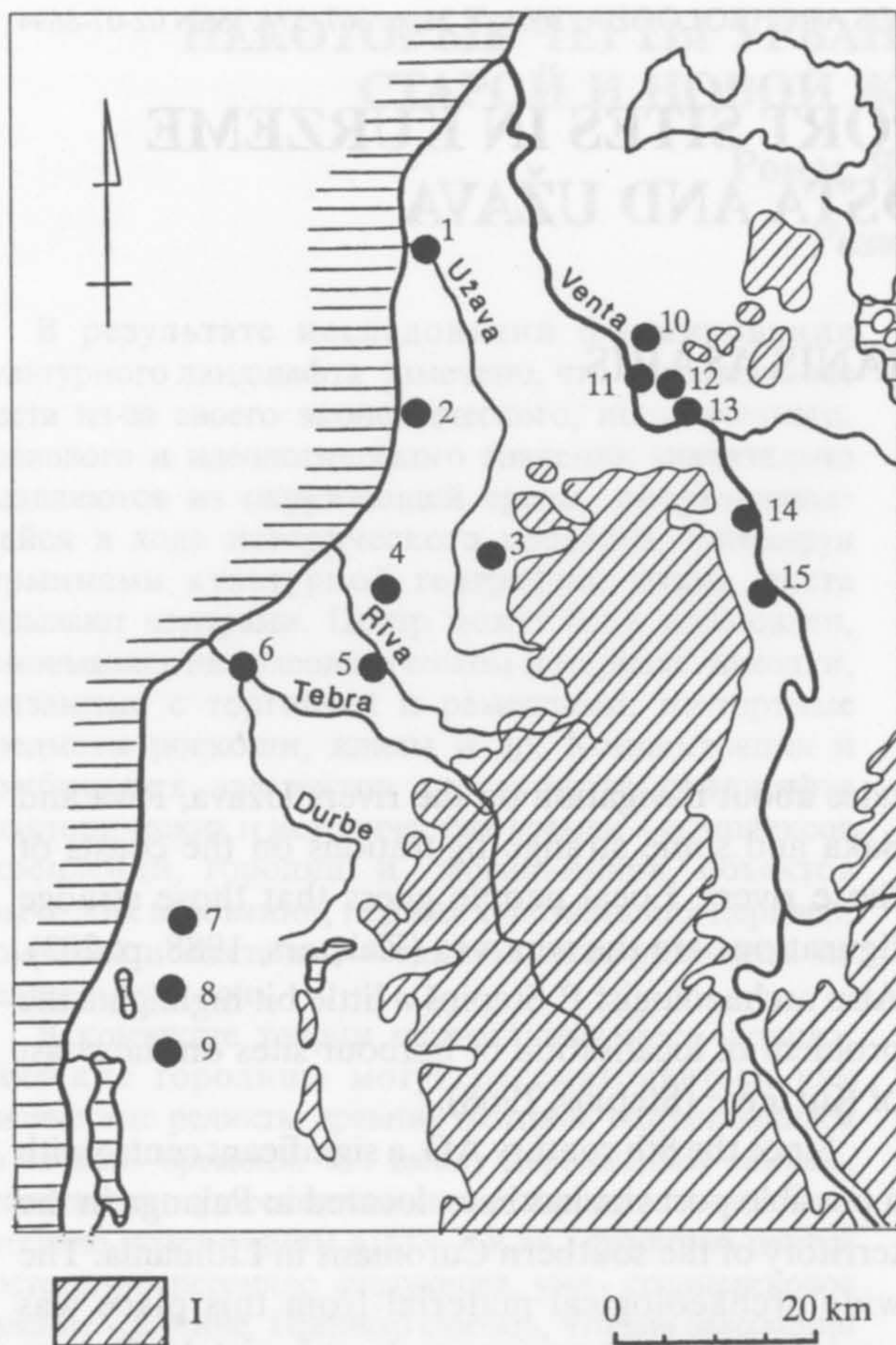


Fig. 1. In the article mentioned populated places and find places more than 50 m over sea level: 1 – Užava; 2 – Sārņate; 3 – Alsungas Dižkārti; 4 – Alsungas Tīrlauku marsh; 5 – Pievika; 6 – Saka; 7 – Vērgales Ploču marsh; 8 – Kapsēde; 9 – Grobiņa; 10 – hillfort Lagzdīne; 11 – hillfort Zlēku Pabērzkalns; 12 – hillfort Zlēku Karātavu kalns; 13 – hillfort Paventas; 14 – hillfort Padure; 15 – hillfort Veckuldīga. | – forests.

Considering aforesaid it seems very realistic, that in the past on the western coast of Kurzeme and further to north from Grobiņa and Liepāja there were trade centres with harbours for international trade and also for military needs. Investigations in Gotland showed that during Vikings age and even longer beside large and famous ports (Lundström, 1981; 1983), there also were lot of much smaller port sites, which were yoked with one parish (Lundström, 1970; Cederlund, 1979; Carlsson, 1991; 1998). A similar situation is traced also in Öland (Floderus, 1985; Rasch, 1988). But still the difference between Gotland and circumstances on the western coast of Kurzeme is quite big. The coastline of

Gotland is very indented, the seafloor and coast is rocky and craggy. For western coastline of Kurzeme more typical is equability, the seafloor and coast is sandy. For the northern part of coastline more typical is a gentle strand, but for southern part (territory of Jūrkalne and Pāvilosta) – precipitous downs. This territory is a part of Littoral lowland, and from the geological point of view the origin of plains in south is the Baltic Ice lake, but in north – Littoral sea and Ancilus lake (Геологическое, 1979, с. 415–416). Although the nature of coasts of Kurzeme and Gotland are different, there still is a possibility, that on the western coast of Kurzeme beside large and famous navigation centres, like Palanga and Grobiņa, there also were a lot of much smaller ports and little port sites or wharves. The coastline of Kurzeme does not allow to develop naturally created and protected port site. On the coast of Kurzeme have never been such port sites. All ports on the coast of Kurzeme were always man-made.

In Latvia, for the time being, there was no attempt to recognise in nature such complexes of archaeological heritage. This is the reason why a definite method for recognition of such objects is not developed and there is no definite terminology for them. Such objects can be called “ports”, “port sites”, “harbours”, “wharves”, “trade centres”, etc. In this publication “port” and “port site” are used as technological terms and they are understandable also as other archaeological evidences connected with ships and navigation. They could be also ancient settlements, burial fields, eventually entreps, shipyards and dockyards, and other evidences connected with ships and shipyard. In North-European archaeological literature such places are deeply investigated and widely discussed (The archaeology, 1979; Conference, 1985; Cederlund, 1987; Aspects, 1991; A spirit, 1993).

In 1996, with an aim to fact-find the possible port sites and to investigate the circumstances favourable for their establishment, between Pāvilosta in the South and Užava in the North archaeological surveys were undertaken as part of project “Culture Clash or Compromise 1100–1400.” This territory, together with forests located at the sea, is large enough to represent the navigation activities of Curonians and archaeological heritage connected with this. The principles of location of ports is comparable to similar principles of location of archaeological heritage in northern part of

Kurzeme and western part of Vidzeme. The investigations were concentrated on the areas favorable for establishment of ports due to geographical circumstances, involving comparison of distribution of certain archaeological sites, historical maps and evidences from written sources. Similar criteria for the location of ancient port sites combined with archaeological excavations and phosphate analysis data have been successfully implemented, for example, in Gotland (Carlsson, 1991; 1998). The near location of Gotland and eventual in definite period similarly organized society (Šterns, 1996) could be the reason of similar principles of location of port sites and exploitation of them in Gotland and Kurzeme. In 1995, in western part of Kurzeme a large archaeological survey was undertaken under the guidance of V. Berzins (Bērziņš, 1996b). But V. Berzins in his scientific work paid more attention to survey of heritage of Stone Age and Bronze Age.

At present, the biggest inhabits in the Latvian territory close to the Baltic sea are Pāvilosta, Jūrkalne, Sārnate and Užava. Generally this territory is in the coastal lowlands with an inhabited zone a couple of kilometers wide along the sea. Behind this zone to the South of Užava there are wide, at present meliorated, meadows, but more to the south, there are large forests. More densely inhabited territory is situated further in land, 5–20 kilometers beyond the forests, where the West Kurzeme Highlands begin (Fig. 1). According to historical maps, a similar situation existed 200 to 300 years ago. It is also possible that a similar situation existed already at the end of the 1st millennium and during the first centuries of the 2nd millennium. The written sources of the 13th century AD also provide evidence of such situation. In those written records Užava (Osua – year 1230), Sārnate (Sarnitus – year 1230), Pievika (Pewe – year 1253) and Saka (Saceze – year 1230) are mentioned. So far no layer of adequate place, which were inhabited by tribes, was found (with an exception – Saka). About eventual port site in Coastal Lowlands at Kapsēde a couple of kilometers from present coast purports the tales about port site and ship-wreckage found in gravel-diggings. In this port site a fragment of iron anchor is found and now it is exhibited in Liepāja museum. There are also information, that in near Ploču marsh a ship was found (Stepiņš, 1968, p. 183). Kapsēde is situated outside of research territory, but yet the references about port

site and ship-findings are important in investigation of system of location of port sites further to North.

During investigation of coasts of river Užava, a possible port site place is found at lower reaches of this river – 3 km before falling in Baltic sea. Cultural layer is discovered at right coast of river Užava to south-east from archeologically investigated cemetery from middle ages (15th–16th AD) (Сизов, 1896, с. 10; Klepere, 1975). There are also a Scandinavian tortoise fibula from the 10th–11th AD, necklaces and bangles discovered (Mugurēvičs, 1973, p. 52).

In Sārnate an assured port site from the 13th AD is not discovered, but there is a theory that this port site was located about 2 km from the present coastline of sea at the left coast of small river, where later the Sārnate manor was situated. In neighbourhood of this place another cultural layer is discovered, but for the present for precise dating is not enough information and material.

Also in Pievika, to north of home “Ojāri”, about 700 m from the left coast of river Rīve a cultural layer from the unknown period was discovered.

It seems, that the most important discovered port site was situated at river Saka. Here, at the confluence of rivers Durbe and Saka, about 4 km from the sea, the Curonian hillfort is located. The territory of this hillfort together with the ancient town covers more than 1.5 ha. During construction works of the bridge over river Tebra, in northern part some wooden pales were discovered, but in hillfort-iron spearhead, iron arrowhead and early wheelmade pottery fragments. Sadly in underwater investigation, carried out by V. Rains and D. Šillers, no evidences from Middle Ages about port site in Saka were discovered. Sakas cultural layer from Middle ages, discovered in territory of hillfort as well as at the right coast of Saka, don't allow to speak about cultural layer from this period. In 1979, 1.5 km from hillfort, where little river Kūķu falls in Saka Curonian fire-graves were discovered (Mugurēvičs, 1980, p. 82). V. Bērziņš, responding on materials of investigation, deduces, that the territory around confluence of Tebra and Durbe was widely exploited for farming during the Iron Age and that there were developed perennial fields (Bērziņš V., 1996a, p. 35).

In order to understand the possibilities shipping for rivers (which fall in sea) of this territory, the river Rīva from sea till Pievika was investigated deeper. If we suppose, that hydrological and other circumstances

were the same as they are now, then the use of Rīva for constant shipping in past is doubtful. If so, then the development of Pievika, in spite of location at Rīva, we can motivate with other circumstances not connected with near location of sea. But because of lack of deeper investigations about hydrological circumstances in this period, this theory is only a hypothesis.

In the investigated territory, the biggest rivers are Saka (4 km long, result of confluence of Durbe and Tebra), already mentioned Rīva and Užava. The hydrological circumstances at this coast of Baltic sea are the reason of rivers with silt mouth and from our point of view, those rivers are unusable for shipping. The same problem concerns also mouth of Saka, where is located nowadays used port Pāvilosta. But this port has been created and developed under simulated conditions. However, taking into account the low sea-gauge of ships from Viking age and later, which was not deeper than 1 m (von Fircks, 1979, p. 37; Pāvulāns, 1987, 9), such silt river mouth could not be a stop for entrance of ships into river through river-mouth.

According to the written evidence and the results of archaeological surveying, it is possible to emphasise new aspects. Possible port sites are not observed at the very seashore or at the mouths of the rivers, but at least some kilometres from the sea. This fact distinguishes the possible Curonian port sites from the Viking ports in Gotland (Carlsson, 1988) and is more similar to the situation of ancient centres in the Southern Baltic (Volin, Kolobrzeg etc.) (Leciejewicz, 1985, p. 177, 179) and the southern part of Scandinavian peninsula (Hagberg, 1985).

The potential of shipping in the investigated territory limits the water-parting between Venta basin and basin of rivers flowing to Baltic sea. The real borderline was the bluff of Baltic Ice Lake, which we can distinguish very clear in region of Alsunga. It means that shipping in this territory was possible only on waterways of Littoral Lowland. It is possible that ports at lower reaches of rivers served a particular region, because, by shipping upstream along Užava, also Durbe and Tebra and maybe also Rīva, sailors could reach further parts of land and also the centres of Kurzeme, which are not located at the sea. This is the main difference from Gotland where there are no such big rivers and port sites are located directly at the sea. This situation retrospective could prove the situation in the

17th century AD, when Aizpute port was located at Saka, where the goods from big ships were transhipped into smaller boats with lower sea-gauge and through Tebra transported to Aizpute (Juškevičs, 1931, p. 61–62). We can consider that at the end of the 1st millennium and during the first centuries of the 2nd millennium the seaside was inhabited very poorly, but port sites and trade centres were located further into land. This conclusion is also evidenced by the folklore records of finds of ship-wrecks in upper reaches of the Užava distant from the sea. For example, O. Engels published his own memories from time before II World War about wooden ship oddments with figurehead of dragon on fore found in forest at declivity of Baltic Ice Lake in Alsunga, near to home “Dižkārtas”, 10 km from Baltic sea: “That, what men see in sedge, has no relevance to furrowing, sowing and reaping. That has come from other, strange world’s circles and men keep in silence because of perplexity. Only “Dižkārtas” landlord, pleased with the silence and perplexity, wisely smirks: “Well, and you didn’t want to come! This for you is not a rutabaga, such things don’t grow in any field.” We have to agree with him, but he can tell more: “This, my dear relatives, is a figurehead of pirate-ship.” There is no doubt, that this really was a pirate-ship, because which plain dealer would be in need for such a monster. Now our landlord shows with pipe-stem to field: “Look! There is the ship itself.” And really over grass tower black slat-endings. Other part of ship is already under swords” (Engels, 1996). Another ship, around year 1890, was found in Alsunga’s Tirlauku swamp. P. Stepiņš had a hypothesis that the ship came here upstream along Užava (Stepiņš, 1968, p. 185) and we agree with him. Considering the circumstances and near location of river Užava, also “Dižkārtu” ship could come to his last halt upstream along Užava.

In the Article 46 of the well known Egil Skalagrímsson saga, where the forays of Egil and his brother Torolf in Kurzeme around the year 925 are described, is also written about forest between seaside and territories inhabited by Curonians. “One day they landed at mouth of big river. Further was a big forest... Egil together with 12 men passed through the forest. There they found large fields and buildings (after Kursis, 1998, p. 38). R. Klaustiņš contemplated this situation and concluded that to localize precisely the river from saga is impossible, but the most significant information from this saga is about forest between seaside in inhabitation

(Klaustiņš, 1920, p. 89). The centres close to the sea-later fishermen's villages relate only to 14th century AD when Kurzeme was conquered by the German crusaders. At this time a part of those centres (Ēvaņģe, Ulmale) for first time were mentioned in written sources. Interesting are also evidences, written by H. Strods, about sudden participation of large number of Curonians in international trade through sea during later time. So around year 1850 municipalities confiscated 353 boats from fishermen and men of the soil of Rucava, Nica and Pērkone. It was done to avoid import of contraband from Gotland and other territories (Strods, 1997, p. 43).

The access to centres in the inner part of Kurzeme was provided by river Venta. Probably, hillforts in the lower and middle reaches of Venta were connected with the marine navigation on a large scale. As bigger or smaller trade centres with possible port sites on Venta we can mention Piltenes Lagzdīnes hillfort, Zlēku Pabērzkalns, Karātavu kalns, Pavenšu hillfort, Padures and Veckuldīgas hillforts. Investigation of those places

as port sites is not a part of this study, but the fact, that at Venta coasts have been found tortoise fibula from the 9th–10th century AD (in Zlēku Priedinicki and Cirkale) (Jansson, 1992, p. 64. Nr. 7, p. 65. Nr. 5.) and other objects with Scandinavian origin (Šturms, 1949) and also the mentioning of Venta (Uitau) in Sjonhem (Gotland) runic stone (Senās, 1937, p. 62; Jansson, 1987, p. 56) from 11th–12th century AD, proves that already since Viking time Venta water way was a significant part of international trade. A significant role of Venta lasts also after German crusaders invasion till the 16th–17th century AD (Pāvilāns, 1971, p. 121, 142–143.).

The advantage of the Venta water way for international contacts with centres in inner Kurzeme probably explains why the coastal zone between Pāvilosta and Užava is not involved at a higher level in Curonian international activities. Nevertheless, the finds of ships in the Užava basin and the use of Saka river in later medieval times for navigation may suggest earlier traditions of the use of the Coastal Lowland rivers for international navigation and contacts.

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ABBREVIATES

AUS – Acta Universitatis Stockholmiensis. Studia Baltica Stockholmiensia.

AV – Acta Visbyensia.

DVK – Dabas un vēstures kalendārs.

LVIŽ – Latvijas Vēstures institūta žurnāls.

ZAS – Zinātniskās atskaites sesijas materiāli par archeologu... gada pētījumu rezultātiem.

ISTORINIŲ UOSTŲ VIETOS KURŽEMĖJE TARP PAVILOSTOS IR UŽAVOS

Juris Urtāns, Jānis Asaris

Santrauka

Geografinė Kuršo padėtis buvo vienas palankių veiksnių laivybai plėtotis. Duomenų apie laivybą ir tarptautinę prekybą randama įvairiuose šaltiniuose, ypač Skandinavijos sagose ir kronikose. Šie šaltiniai buvo tyrinėjami dar prieškarinio Latvijoje. Daug pasidarbavo istorikai A. Špekė, V. Bilkinis, A. Švabė, E. Andersonas, A. Kursis ir kt. Archeologiniai duomenys apie tarptautinę prekybą ir konkrečius jos centrus (išskyrus Gruobinės archeologinį kompleksą) dar netyrinėti. A. Zalsteris savo publikacijoje apie navigaciją Kuržemėje mėgino susieti rašytinius šaltinius su archeologiniais duomenimis ir iškėlė hipotezę, kad dar iki XIII amžiaus kai kurios vietovės, kaip antai: Lūšciemis, Irbė, Košragas, Pitragas – buvo uostai ir laivų statybos vietos. Nuo VIII a. svarbus prekybos ir laivininkystės centras buvo pietinėje Kuršo dalyje – Palangoje. Apie tai plačiai rašė archeologas V. Žulkus. Kitas toks centras buvo Gruobinėje, kurioje, galimas daktas, buvo ir uostas. Be šių dviejų centrų, rytinėje Baltijos jūros pakrantėje turėjo būti ir daugiau nedidelių uostų, prekyviečių ar prieplaukų. Dėl to 1996 metais šių archeologijos objektų paieška Kurše tarp Pavilosto pietuose ir Užavos šiaurėje tapo projekto „Kultūrų sąveika

ar kompromisas. 1100–1400“ dalimi (pav. 1). Tyrinėjimų metu buvo atsižvelgiama į geografines sąlygas, archeologijos paminklų išsidėstymą, istorinių šaltinių duomenis, žemėlapius.

Svarbiausios radimvietės aptiktos Užavos upės pakrantėje, apie 3 km nuo žiočių, taip pat prie Sakos upės, apie 4 km nuo jūros, kur piliakalnis ir gyvenvietė dabar užima apie 1,5 ha plotą. Perspektyvios laivybos arterijos turėjo būti ir Ventos bei kitų upių, įtekančių į jūrą, baseinai.

ILIUSTRACIJŲ SĄRAŠAS

1 pav. Straipsnyje paminėtos apgyventos vietos bei radimvietės, esančios vietovėse per 50 m virš jūros lygio: 1 – Užava; 2 – Sarnatė; 3 – Alsungos Dižkarčiai; 4 – Alsungos Tyrlaukės pelkė; 5 – Pievika; 6 – Saka; 7 – Vėrgalės Pločų pelkė; 8 – Kapsėdė; 9 – Gruobinia; 10 – Lagzdynės piliakalnis; 11 – Zlėkų Pabėrzkalns piliakalnis; 12 – Zlėkų Karotavų kalnas piliakalnis; 13 – Paventės piliakalnis; 14 – Padurės piliakalnis; 15 – Veckuldigos piliakalnis. | – miškai.

Iš anglų k. vertė Inita Tamošiūnienė

МЕСТА ИСТОРИЧЕСКИХ ПОРТОВ В КУРЗЕМЕ МЕЖДУ ПАВИЛОСТОЙ И УЖАВОЙ

Юрис Уртанс, Янис Асарис

Резюме

Географическое положение Курземе было одним из положительных факторов для развития судоходства. Данные о судоходстве и международной торговле известны из разных источников, особенно Скандинавских саг и хроник. Эти источники исследовались еще в предвоенной Латвии. Огромный труд вложили историки А. Шпеке, В. Билкинс, А. Швабе, Е. Андерсонс, А. Курсис и др. Однако археологические данные о международной торговле в целом и

конкретных ее центрах (исключая археологический комплекс Груобиня) еще не изучены. А. Залстерс в своей публикации о навигации в Курземе пробовал соединить письменные источники и археологические данные и выдвинул гипотезу, что некоторые местности, например, Лушцемс, Ирбе, Кошрагс, Питрагс, были портами и местами кораблестроения до XIII в. С VIII в. важный центр торговли и судоходства был в южной части Курземе – в Паланге. Об этом много

писал археолог В. Жулкус. Другой подобный центр был в Груобини, где, по всей вероятности, мог быть и порт. Кроме этих двух центров на морском побережье восточной Балтики должны были существовать и другие мелкие порты, рынки и пристани. Поиск таких объектов археологии в Курземе между южной стороной Павилосты и севером Ужавы стал частью проекта «Взаимодействие культур или компромисс. 1100–1400» (рис. 1). В ходе исследования принимались во внимание географические условия, расположение археологических памятников, данные исторических источников, карты.

Самые важные памятники обнаружены на берегах реки Ужава, приблизительно в 3 км от устья, также у реки Сака, в 4 км от моря, где городище и селище

занимают площадь около 1,5 га. Перспективные артерии судоходства должны были быть и в бассейне Венты и других рек, впадающих в море.

СПИСОК ИЛЛЮСТРАЦИЙ

Рис. 1. Упомянутые в статье поселения и места находок, находящиеся в 50 м над уровнем моря: 1 – Ужава; 2 – Сарнате; 3 – Алсунгос Дижкарчяй; 4 – болото Алсунгос Тирлауке; 5 – Певика; 6 – Сака; 7 – болото Вергалес Плочяй; 8 – Капседе; 9 – Груобиня; 10 – городище Лагздине; 11 – городище Злеку Паберзкалнс; 12 – городище Злеку Каротаву калнс; 13 – городище Павенте; 14 – городище Падуре; 15 – городище Вецкулдига. | – леса.

Перевод с литовского Ольги Антоновой

Prof. habil. dr. Juris Urtanas (Juris Urtāns)
Valsts kultūras pieminekļu aissardzības inspekcija,
M. Pils iela 19, LV-1050, Rīga, Latvija.

Dr. Janis Asaris (Jānis Asaris)
Valsts kultūras pieminekļu aissardzības inspekcija,
M. Pils iela 19, LV-1050, Rīga, Latvija.

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