

Swedish Allies in the Saga World

At the mythical battlefield of *Bravellir* (Sw. Bråvallarna), Danes and the Swedes clashed in a fight of epic dimensions. The over-aged Danish king Harald Hildetand finally lost his life, and his nephew king Sigurdr *hringr* won Denmark for the Swedes. The story appears in a fragment of a Norse saga from around 1300. But since Saxo Grammaticus tells it, the written tradition must go back at least to the late 12th century. Writing in Latin he prefers to call it *bellum Suetici*, 'the Swedish war'. It's for several reasons obvious that Saxo has built his text on a Norse text that must have been quite similar to the preserved fragment.

The battle of *Bravellir* – the Norse fragment claims – was noteworthy in ancient tales for having been the greatest, the hardest and the most even and uncertain of the wars that had been fought in the Nordic countries.¹ Both sources give long lists of the famous heroes that joined the two armies in a way that recalls the list of ships in Homer's *Iliad*. These champions are the knight-errants of Germanic epics, to some degree related with those of *chansons de geste*. They are presented with characteristic epithets and eponyms that point out their origins in a town, a tribe or a country. When summed up they communicate a geographic vision of the northern World in the 11th and 12th centuries. The Saga fragment states that the Swedish King *Hringr* summoned *lidi vm*

EAST BALTIC VIKINGS - WITH PARTICULAR CONSIDERA- TION TO THE CURONIANS

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*allt Suiauelldi ok Uestra-Gautland, ok mikit lid hafdi hann af Noregi...*¹ his followers from all the realm of the Svear, and western Götaland, and he had many followers from Norway'. King Haralldr on his side mobilizes *her um allt Danauelldi, ok mikill here kom or Aðstr-Riki ok allt or Konu-gardi ok af Saxlandi...* 'a host from the Danish realm, "the Eastern Realm", all of Kiev and Saxony.' Indeed it was a battle involving all of northern Europe.

Saxo gives even longer lists, presenting additional heroes.² Since the geography of the narrative seems to be loaded with hidden meaning it's of no small interest that Saxo has made systematic changes from the probable content of his lost Norse original. In the first place he has inserted many more Danish fighters, thereby improving the comparatively thin Danish line in the Norse narrative. However Saxo has also improved the Swedish side in a systematic way, by presenting people like *Gummi e Gyslamarchia* (literally 'from the hostage borderland' – possibly indicating Carelia³), *Regnaldus Rutenus*, *Rathbarti nepos* (Rutenus = the 'Russian') and *Lesy Pannoniorum victor* (literally 'the Pole that conquered the Pannonians'), all indicating eastern provenance.⁴ Only Saxo also mentions *Calmaria oppidum* (Kalmar, by the end of the 12th century a newly founded Swedish city on the Baltic) and the trading harbour of *Garn* on Gotland. New in Saxo's account is also that the Gotlanders fought on the side of the Svear, and that great crowds of *Curetum Estonumque...* 'Curonians and Estonians' were covering the flanks of the Swedish army.⁵

The first point we must establish about the Battle of Brívellir is that the story is altogether mythical. No Scandinavian scholar of today is likely to believe that it describes an actual event. The *name* may have its background in some ancient tribal encounter, but the story as we meet it is purely a work of literatu-

re. The second point to underline is that the narrative is a story with a *meaning*. I have discussed the problem of its hidden messages at length elsewhere.⁶ Here I will concentrate on the detail of Curonians and Estonians providing auxiliary troupes to the king of Sweden, which is found only in Saxo's version of the story, conceived in masterful Latin around 1200. Why did the Danish *scriptor* claim the existence of such an alliance? Is the existence of East Baltic military hosts on a Scandinavian theatre of war confirmed at all in other historical sources? And how could he have imagined them to appear in great crowds?

The 12th and 13th Century Evidence

A possible thread to follow may be found in another event that Saxo recorded with many elaborate details. It's the story of a Danish *ledung* fleet (conscript navy) looking for East Baltic pirates in 1170, and in doing that also invading the Swedish island of Öland. The same incident is reported more briefly in a Norse history work, the *Knytlinga saga*, although with interesting differences. One such difference is that the *Knytlinga* claims the pirates to have been Curonians, whereas Saxo – just as in the Bravellir narrative – maintains that they were Estonians and Curonians operating together.⁷ As is well known the two sources show striking resemblances from book XIV in *Gesta Danorum* and Chapter 107 in the *Saga*.⁸ The most plausible reason for this is that both authors build on a common source, which according to Curt Weibull we may look upon as a proto-*Knytlinga* from the 12th century. In any case the author of *Knytlinga* has also used independent sources.⁹ Even though Saxo again has followed a written Norse source, he has also had access to first-hand witnesses in his immediate surroundings. As often when he reports about fairly contemporary events, his superior Bishop Absalon appears among the story's main actors.

The series of events is that the some of the Danish *ledung*, keeping watch in the home-waters against the Vends, is suddenly ordered to make a longer journey. Knytlinga saga explains that king Valdemar had got news that Curonians were ravaging in Blekinge. Lead by bishop Absalon and duke Christopher, the King's son out of wedlock, the ships went there without finding them. Hence they continued north to Öland, both sources concur. The island, of course, was a part of Sweden. After the Swedish King Knut's accession to the throne a war prevailed between Danes and Swedes, Saxo explains. Despite that, the Danish force intended to spare the islanders since consideration for the common religion should prevail over the hostility between realms. The Saga tells a different story. Arriving on Öland, the Danes seized much goods and many men, it states bluntly.¹⁰

According to Saxo, the inhabitants of the island told the Danes that the pagans were lying in wait for piracy in a harbour nearby. As fast as they could, the Danes approached the place mentioned, rowing without waiting for wind, which confirms that the harbour in question indeed lay nearby. According to the Saga, the Danes having returned to their ships, were told that *Kurir varu vid Mn...* 'Curonians were at Mön', which is an island far south in the Danish archipelago. Acting on this information, the Saga continues, the Danes released their Ölandic captives and headed for the indicated place. They found the Curonians at *eina hefn, er heitir Jarnloka...* 'a harbour, called The Iron Lock'. The release of the captured Ölanders – according to the Knýtlinga – enhances to some extent Saxo's claim of Catholic brotherhood-treatment. Thus, he needs not to have 'lied' although nothing is said about restitution of goods. The information given in the Saga, however, that the enemy had been seen at the Danish island of Mön, corresponds poorly to Saxo's 'nearby'.

According to Saxo, one of the Estonian ships kept watch, but headed into the open sea when the men caught sight of the Danes. We thus get a topographical hint that the harbour was situated in a bay without a clear view over the open sea. It may be added that such a place is not easily found on Öland, whereas this kind of topography is frequently found on the Swedish mainland coast opposite Öland, called Möre and often written *Muri* in medieval times. The version told by the Knýtlinga explains that the Curonians drew up their ships when they saw the approaching Danes, thinking that they *Svkar vaeri...* 'were Svear', a piece of information not needed for narrative-technical reasons, that becomes most interesting since it supports Saxo's statement instead, that the harbour – called Jarnloka by the Saga – lay where a Swedish *ledung* might be expected to show up, which suits 'near' Öland much better than Mön. It will seem that the name of Mon is a misreading by a copyist of the saga. Between *Mon* and *Mori* there may be a long geographical distance, but in medieval palaeography there is just one small dot that makes the difference.

Saxo adds a detailed description of the following fight that continued over two days, the first of which the Danes suffered some casualties, since they impulsively ran into a trap. The second day however 'the Barbarians' were slaughtered to the last man and none was left who could tell about their defeat. After having shared the spoils and repaired the ships the Danes buried those of their fallen men who belonged to the peasantry on the place, but the corpses of the notables they laid in salt in order to bring them back to Denmark.¹¹ Thus, Saxo surprisingly ends his report of the incident. The Saga has not had much to say about all this, but states that the Danes, after having killed the Curonians, took their ships and *föru heim...* 'went home'.

The concluding expression underlines that this incident had occurred in the Swedish province of Möre, situated on the opposite side of Kalmarsund, within sight of Öland. If Jarnloka had been situated on Mon, they ought to have been at home already! The strange name of the harbour *per se*, favours this interpretation too. Möre and adjacent forestall territories were important iron producers during the 12th century, and many place names begin with *järn* remain from that period, even if no one exactly answers to 'the iron lock'. Their position might even have been right in the heart of the province, by the Boholmarna in Västra Sjön, close to Hossmo, where the topography fits the description of the reports, and where a locality by the little stream falling out in the sea carries the remarkable name *Järnsäng*.¹²

We may never know the precise place where these East Baltic 'pirates' were staying, but even so we must recognise that Kalmarsund was a strategic passage in the communication system at that day, whereas at the same time Öland and Möre were Swedish regions bordering on Denmark. It's worthy of note that an islet off Öland's eastern coast is called Kuraholm in medieval texts (today: Kårholm), which *may* indicate a place where Curonians had camped, albeit another interpretation is equally possible.¹³ Nothing is said in either of the two sources, whether the relations between the East Baltic vikings and the indigenous Swedes were hostile or not. If we furthermore compare the appearance of Curonians and Estonians in the Swedish fighting force at Bravellir to their mutual appearance in the Kalmarsund incident of 1170, we may think that (a) Saxo may have got the idea that the two East Baltic nations were operating together way back in epical times from the latter incident; and if we turn the argument upside down that (b) he may be implying that the Curonians and Estonians were actually contributing to

the Swedish war effort in 1170, since Saxo also tells us that there was a state of war between Sweden and Denmark.

Whatever the case, the 1170 incident in Kalmarsund is the first trustworthy record of East Baltic fighting forces appearing in Swedish and Danish waters. At least two circumstances are worthy of note here. These warriors or pirates were operating along the leading east-west sea route: departing from Schleswig (or gradually more often from Lübeck) cutting through the Danish archipelago, following the eastern coast of Scania and Blekinge into Kalmarsund, cutting east from the northern part of the sound towards Gotland, Curonia and either into the Daugava or east of Osilia between the Estonian islands into the Gulf of Finland. Another branch of the sea route headed north from Kalmarsund into the heartlands of Sweden. Hence clearly, these East Baltic vikings were operating according to some strategic considerations along the sea route which they could have checked much closer to home, which is the first conclusion to be drawn; the other is that the East Baltic fleet had settled in the border region between Denmark and Sweden, where neither kingdom had sufficient military resources.

Since this is the first we hear of maritime raids from the East Baltic countries, the question comes up, whether the practice was a new one. It cannot be answered with any certainty, but we may make a few observations. As the process of Europeanization entered into the Baltic Rim one country after another tended to fall into problematic civil wars. These wars have been given different explanations by previous research, but what seems to be common to them is that the power groups involved were all trying to handle the new opportunities provided by Europeanization – aspects of the church, trade, military techniques etc. Hence there had been continuous struggles in Denmark in the 1130s to 50s, and in Sweden during the 1120s (of which hardly anything is known) and then again in the 1150s and 60s.

One important aspect of this was that the sea route described above, diagonally crossing the Baltic via Gotland, became dramatically more frequen-

ted, on the cost of the northern route passing the heartlands of Sweden. During the reign of Sverker I (c. 1132-57) Sweden had resumed its traditional eastern expeditions, however adding elements of Christian mission to them. Often the target of these routes were the Neva or Volkov estuaries, but in 1164 according to the Novgorodian chronicle the Swedes had suffered a fatal defeat losing 43 out of 55 ships outside of Ladoga town (Aldeigiuborg). In 1167 the ruling king Karl Sverkersson was killed by another claimant to the kingdom, Knut Eriksson and the civil war was still fought in 1170, together – as we hear – with a hostile Danish intervention. In conclusion, by the time we meet East Baltic raiders in Swedish waters for the first time, Sweden itself was in turmoil.¹⁴

A frequently quoted passage by Henry of Latvia tells how German pilgrims on their way to Riga in the spring of 1203, meet sixteen Osilian ships off Lister (on the border between Scania and Blekinge in medieval Denmark), who had just plundered a church, killed people and taken prisoners *sicut tam Estonos quam Curones pagani in regno Dacie et Suecie hactenus facere consueverant...* ‘just as pagan Estonians and Curonians have used to do until now in Denmark and Sweden’. Under threat of having to fight the pilgrims, the Osilians deceitfully maintained that they *pacem se cum Rigensibus fecisse...* ‘had made peace with the inhabitants of Riga’, which was accepted.¹⁵

The *modus operandi* of these Osilians is remarkably parallel to what Saxo and Knýtlinga described regarding the 1170 incident. To get to Lister, the pirates of 1203 had passed on the inside or outside of Öland, possibly using the same landmarks and bases of operation as their predecessors had a generation before. The 1203-story has a continuation, however. Later on resting in Visby, the pilgrims happened to see the same band of Osilians pas-

sing off the city coast without being questioned. This made the combative pilgrims furious. They tried to involve the *cives* and the *mercatores* visiting the city in a punishing attack, but these parties preferred *pacis securitate cum eis...* ‘the security of peace with them (the Osilians)’. The pilgrims took up arms and succeeded in seizing some of the pirate ships. From the description of the battle it appears that these ships were manned by some 30 persons.¹⁶ This means that they were almost as big as their Scandinavian counterparts.

Another time, in 1210, a group of German pilgrims – *i.e.* volunteers in the Sword Mission – were on their way back from Riga to Germany after having served their period in Livonia. Having crossed the open sea to Gotland, they were surprised to find eight Curonian ships in Fårösund off the northern part of the Swedish island. The German warriors made an attack impulsively, but, according to Henry, not prudently enough, which is why almost thirty *milites et alii* (knights and others) lost their lives. He describes with rhetorical disgust how the Curonians gathered the fallen men, stripped them and divided *vestimenta ac cetera spolia...* ‘clothes and other spoils’ among themselves. Later some Gotlanders *devote colligentes sepelierunt ...* ‘devotedly got them together and buried them’.¹⁷

In this instance one might find that the pilgrims had themselves to blame, and perhaps the author felt that the event was unclear in its *sens moral*, since he – otherwise so purely chronological – after an inserted short notice of a Russian attack in Estonia in his thinking returns to Gotland and an event that occurred five years later. This time it is about a group of pilgrims who – on their way to Riga in Frisian ships – succeeded in encircling and annihilating Curonians somewhere near Gotland, who were loaded *cum magna rapina ...* ‘with rich spoils’. These more succes-

sful pilgrims brought four ships and the entire booty to Riga *et oves infinitas, quas de terris christianorum spoliaverant ...* 'together with innumerable sheep that they had stolen in Christian countries' (= Gotland?).¹⁸

Another time – in the spring of 1226 – no lesser person than William of Albano, the papal legate, returning from his visitation of Livonia *ad naves circa mare diu resedit, ventorum gratiam expectans ...* 'remained for a long time with the ships at sea, waiting for fair winds'. *Et vidit subito redeuntes Osilianos a Suecia cum spoliis et captivis quam plurimis...* 'and suddenly he saw Osilians coming back from Sweden with rich spoils and numerous captives'.¹⁹ Since the legate was on his way to Visby, the observation must have been made, either in Dünamünde as the commentary to Bauer's translation suggests, or on the coast of Curonia – in any case, it refers to the same sea route diagonally crossing the Baltic via Gotland, as the previous examples.

These few items more or less sums up the entire case. There are a few other references to East Baltic piracy that might be added, such as the burning of Sigtuna by – alas! – unidentified pagans in 1187, but they all have their deficiencies. On the other hand the ones quoted here are fairly matter of fact and trustworthy. They state that between ca. 1170 and ca. 1230 both Estonians and Curonians *had the habit of plundering the Swedish and Danish coasts*.²⁰

The Moral Issue

Clearly these Curonians and Osilians enjoyed a very bad reputation in western sources. The simple verdict of a fighting fleet of pagan origin as barbaric pirates is a typical topos of the crusading period. Authors like Saxo Grammaticus and Henry of

Latvia where very partisan in these matters, far from trying-to-be objective reporters of what was going on. Furthermore these writers were subordinated tools in the service of great ecclesiastical politicians, such as Absalon of Lund and Albert of Riga. Bad reputation easily fell on those who opposed their masters. The question arises whether these peoples are in need of a historical revaluation. Could it be possible to find explanations that go behind the stereotypes of crusading propaganda?

In several instances the existence of peace treaties has already been mentioned. We do not know whether the Curonians (and possibly Osilians) had some peace arrangements with the people of Öland in 1170; but it's worthy of note that no atrocities committed by the pagan pirates are mentioned in either of the sources. The Osilians of 1203 claimed to be at peace with the people of Riga, and the people of Visby preferred to live in peace with them as well. Obviously the same applied to the Curonians, since Henry of Latvia describes a peace-agreement negotiated with the Germans after the foundation of Riga in 1201. He tells that when the Christians had agreed, peace was confirmed in the pagan way, *sanguinis effusione* ... 'through letting of blood'.²¹ And we have seen that the Curonians too, were able to abide on the coast of Gotland without clashes with the locals.

At Fårösund the Germans coming from Riga had unilaterally broken the peace, which had been ratified by the letting of blood some years before. After the Fårösund incident the Curonians made a serious attack directly on Riga. Henry describes this with the detailed knowledge of a reporter, using a 'we', indicating that again he is writing as an eyewitness: the Curonians had been laying outside the mouth of Daugava for 14 days, he says, praying to their gods for help and casting lots to

know if and when the time was ripe. Also two koggs lay at the Dünamünde waiting for wind. One foggy morning the men on board saw a great army come rowing in. The warships ignored the koggs and went on upstream to surprise the town. However, they were observed by fishermen early in the morning, who succeeded in escaping within the walls and warning the inhabitants. The Curonians then left their ships and formed themselves for battle. The showdown was to last the whole day, except for a lunch pause when the Curonians went back to their ships to eat. In the afternoon the battle became bloody and tough since the people of Riga had received reinforcements from several directions. If a Curonian was seriously wounded he was immediately killed by some compatriot.²²

In the evening the Curonians retired to the southern side of the river and remained there for three days, burnt their dead and celebrated their memory. The Germans, self-confident after having got reinforcements, rode out and challenged them to battle, but the Curonians were occupied with their dead bodies until after three days they made a peaceful retreat.²³ In the latter more detailed report a new dimension appears of the Curonian attitude. The picture of a very strict warrior culture is developed, and we find that it was regulated by deeply felt religious customs and notions of honour.

By the end of the 13th century the Livonian Rhyme Chronicle sums up the contemporary Balt-German vision of Curonia. The picture is predominantly dark:

<i>Da liet bie des meres strant</i>	There lies at the shore of the sea
<i>Ein gegende heisset kürlant</i>	a land called Curonia
<i>Die ist wol vumfzig mile lanc</i> ²⁴	that is a full fifty miles long
<i>Vil kleine cristen mac an irn danc</i>	The poor Christians who by mistake

<i>zu deme selben lande quomen:</i>	come to this very land
<i>In werde lip und gut genomen.</i> ²⁵	will be deprived of life and goods.

However the warnings against the danger for Christians falling in the hands of Curonians might not imply more than that the Germans had no trading peace with some of them. It is indicated that trading ships may unwittingly be stranded on the long shore.

Already in the 12th century commercial powers like the Gotlanders, Germans and Novgorodians were already securing written legal treaties and developing legal customs advantageous to international trade in the Baltic area.²⁶ Previous and parallel to that, varieties of orally concluded peaces were obviously institutionalised among many indigenous peoples, who made them binding by the letting of blood. The possibilities for the Curonians to pass Gotland without being deterred might be due to the fact that they – on a mutual basis – enjoyed peace *there*.²⁷ Therefore the problem could be that there were no treaties between some of the Curonians and the Germans, and that the latter, consequently, had little legal security when sailing along the long shore.

Can this be the plunder economy of which there has been so much discussion in recent years? Or should we see some other mechanism behind these Curonian and Osilian habits? Let us consider their case: Curonians and Osilians are the two East Baltic peoples who are known to have developed sea-going fleets.²⁸ What is obvious is that both nations were positioned directly on sea route-systems. On the other hand we have little definite evidence suggesting that they took a very active part in trade, even though, in both cases, their economic position was clearly improving, and their social organisation intensifying. As

soon as their fleets had become a reality – *t.a.q.* for this is 1170 – it would have been inconceivable to maintain routine trade on the Schleswig-Gotland-Novgorod sea route without having established some kind of understanding with the Curonians and Osilians, since they were in the position to stop it.

Even if it is difficult to pinpoint a political position for the East Baltic vikings, we have ample confirmation that their aggressive behaviour was no mere wild barbaric fury. On the contrary it was exercised within a framework of international agreements, both parties having peace agreements with some neighbouring peoples, yet *not* with all of them. Their activities were akin to 'the Old way of doing it', more in continuation of the alliance systems organised by Viking-age kingdoms, but now possibly put together by the East Baltic nations themselves. And I suppose that it will be as close to a plunder economy that the sources will provide.

Maritime Strength Needs Organisation

When Vladas Žulkus and I met for the first time, which was ten years ago, we came to discuss the problem of how sea faring Curonians were mobilising their fleets – having their ships built, manned and fitted out. The question comes natural to a Scandinavian medievalist, well acquainted with the long discussion of the *ledung* system, mentioned by Norse sagas and described in the regional laws of Denmark, Norway and Sweden. There the duty to build, man and equip the ships was resting on the society of freemen, and the regions were subdivided into suitable 'ships teams', originating from the group of homesteads that had to present one ship, but by and by reorganised into a system of taxation, as the *ledung* fleet was more rarely called into action. We were unable to find a definite answer to the pro-

blem during this first conversation in 1995. But it kept coming up over the years, and the hypothesis tended to be the same: could it be that the Curonian (and Osilian) method of mobilising their seagoing fleets were inspired by the Scandinavian *ledung*?

It is well known that once Curonia was a Swedish tributary land. The evidence is amazingly old. In *Vita Anskarii* from the late 9th century Rimbert tells us of *Gens enim quaedam longe ab eis [Sueonibus] posita, vocata Cori, Sueonum principatui olim subiecta fuerat...* 'a people called *cori*, who lived far away from the Svear, and who had previously been brought under their dominance'. When Ansgar paid his second visit to Birka however – about 852 – this people had mounted an insurrection, not wanting to be subordinated to the Svear anymore. Clearly this refers to the *Curonians* of which we learn that they had five towns (*civitates*), which we ought to comprehend as major hillforts.²⁹ We even get the names of two such 'towns', Seeburg and Apulia. The former may refer to Grobina or – perhaps less likely – to Palanga, whereas the latter clearly points out the inland centre of Apuole, in any case the Swedish area of influence need not have covered all what is later known as Curonia. I will not repeat the series of events described by Rimbert, but it ends up in new Swedish conquest, from which Rimbert records what must be nothing less than a *tributary land subordination treaty*.

Tired of the fighting the Curonians offer: *Nobis iam pax magis quam pugna placet, et foedus vobiscum inire cupimus...* 'Now we would prefer peace to war, and we wish to be your allies'. Then follow five conditions, which the Curonians said they were willing to accept; namely (1) to give everything from the spoils in gold and weapons, which they had acquired in a victory over some Danes (*ex spoliis Danorum in auro et armis*) the previous

year; (2) to offer half a pound of silver (*dimidiam libram argenti*) for each man in the hillfort; (3) to resume the tribute (*censum*) that they used to pay before; (4) to give hostages (*obsides*), and (5) to be as obedient and dutiful (*subiecti et obaudientes*) vis-à-vis the Svea realm as they had been before. On these conditions the king of the Svear settled the alliance with them and went happily back with abundant treasures and 30 men as hostages.³⁰

Around 1075, Adam of Bremen maintains that *Churland* is the largest among the islands that belong to the Swedes, adding that it lies not far from Birka.³¹ Obviously he was drawing this conclusion to some extent from the just-quoted narrative in *Vita Anskarii*. However Adam also quotes King Svend Estridsen of Denmark mentioning that a merchant had had a church built in Curonia, whom Svend himself *multis ad hoc illexit muneribus...* 'had encouraged to it by providing equipment'. Since Svend had served for a long time in Sweden before gaining the Danish throne, he might have given Adam contemporary confirmation of the Curonian dependence of Sweden.³² Also Norse sagas tell, often more sweepingly, of Swedish tributary lands in the east. Most famous is a speech quoted – or rather made up – in Snorri Sturlusson's *Olavssaga*, that previous Swedish kings had sent war expeditions to various countries, conquering Finland, Carrelia, Estonia and Curonia as well as the Eastern Countries far around. The story claims to describe early 11th century conditions but was written around 1230.³³

That there may have been some credibility to these traditions is confirmed by one or two fragmentary stories indicating that the tradition of eastern *ledung* expeditions was upheld even in the 12th century, when it was sometimes interwoven with rudimentary Christian mission. Around 1190 the Cistercian *frater* Theoderic tried to take advantage of a Swedish *ledung* expedition –

including Germans and Gotlanders³⁴ and led by a *dux* (jarl) – to establish a bridgehead for the Christianisation of *Curonia*. However, the fleet was driven by a storm to the Estonian province of Wierland, where three days of plundering began. *Sed dum Virones de fide recipienda tractarent, dux, accepto potius tributo ab eis vela sustollens divertit in molestiam Theutonicorum...* 'But when the Vironians negotiated receiving the Faith, the *dux* preferred to collect a tribute from them and sailed away, to the chagrin of the Germans'.³⁵ The outcome suggests that we should question Theoderic's claim of having made an *agreement* with the Swedish leaders. What *might* indicate some form of negotiation in advance would have been the choice of Curonia as its target. If that was really the case, the idea is likely to have been based on the tradition of Sweden's domination over Curonia, which was documented in Bremen. What rises some doubt as to that claim is that it must have been quite a storm to drive the whole fleet from Curonia, the wide way through the north-west Estonian archipelago, and on a right-angle bend to Wierland.

However the idea is supported by yet another source, which has been too little discussed in this context. Around 1230 the *nuntius* Balduin of Aulna made treaties with a few Curonian regions, one of which was settled with *rex* Lammechinus and his pagan subjects in a territory including the valley of the river Venta. This is the only solid indication of the indigenous emergence of a principality on Curonian territory, and the treaty contains the declaration that his people were prepared to convert into Christendom.³⁶ Baulduin's text explains how the pagans should handle the reform: give hostages, accept priests, have everyone baptized and so on. Then follows a remarkable statement. *Ad eo vero iura, quae persolvere tenetur indigenae de Gotlandia, per omnia perpetuo tenebuntur episcopo suo, suisque praelatis annuatim persolvenda, ita quod nec regno Daciae, nec Suecuae subii-*

cientur. 'But they should for ever have to pay the same fees to their bishop and his prelates as the natives of Gotland are paying, however on the condition that they should not be subordinated to the kingdom of Denmark or that of Sweden. Since we have given eternal freedom as long as they do not leave the [Christian] faith.'³⁷

Here is a Curonian prince negotiating the acceptance of Christianity on the condition of having the independence of his territory recognised by the new western European powerholders in the neighbourhood. However it also contains an indication of previous Christian contacts, launched via Gotland. The unfortunate episode of Theoderic and the Swedish jarl cannot have been the only endeavour. Others must have followed. And it will seem that these contacts had already led to the establishment of a Christian community on the coast of Curonia, perhaps containing native Gotlanders. To fully understand the context, one must also know that the inhabitants of Gotland paid much lower fees to their bishop than other Swedes, which means that the clause has a concrete meaning. Curonian kingship, early Christiansation from the diocese of Linköping via Gotland, and a freedom treaty: it will seem that the text tells us of fragmentary rests of a Swedish tributary land on the coast of Curonia. This is where the link to the Scandinavian *ledung* system is most likely to have hooked.

References

- ¹ *ok var su orrosta soa snorp ok mikil, sem segir i olloum fornvm sogum, at engi orrosta a norðr-londum hait verit med iam-miklu och iamgoðv mannualli til orrostu at telia.* cf. the parallel reference in Heidrek's saga (Ellehoj 1965 p. 90f).
- ² Sugubrot k. 8; SGD VIII:2:1-9, 3:1-13. For the scholarly discussion of these lists, see MS s.v. Bravallabula, I. Skovgaard-Petersen.
- ³ A possibly deliberate misinterpretation of *Glismakr Goi* of the Sgbr. Even though Gislamark, sounds perfectly Swedish, it is difficult to identify. However,

Olaus Magnus, too, has *Gislemarchia* in a list of the more important kingdoms, regions etc that ends his *Historia de gentibus septentrionalibus*. Thus, a considerable territory must have been intended, which has led his commentator Granlund (1976, p. 543) to suggest "Gislalagen i Finland". This word appears otherwise only in Erik's chronicle of ca 1320, and in a version of a Swedish-Russian treaty of 1323 translated into Swedish. It has been suggested (by Vilks, 1964, pp. 9-30) that it is a territorial concept, intended particularly for Carelia, cf. Finnish *kihlakunta*, 'parish, "hundred"'. For the problem, see further: Tarvel, 1998.

⁴ A *Rognualldr hai eda Radbardr hnefi* and a *Læsir* are found in Sogubrot. The name *Læsir* may possibly mean 'Pole', man from (the interior of today's) Poland, cf. the name of the people in Polish *Lęczy*, and in Russian *Ljachy* (Slaski, 1969, p. 243).

⁵ SGD, VIII:3:13.

⁶ Blomkvist, 2005, pp. 237-62.

⁷ The idea may be drawn from the incident of 1170. If so, it is most probably correct, i.e. on the latter occasion.

⁸ C. Weibull, 1915 p. 179ff; C. Weibull, 1976.

⁹ KL s.v. Knytlinga, Albeck; C. Weibull, 1915, pp. 231-36; KL s.v. Saxo, I. Skovgaard-Petersen; Johannesson, 1978, p. 308ff; Lind, 1992, pp. 230-32; Hermanson 2000 p. 204f.

¹⁰ SGD, XIV:40:2-12; Knytlinga saga 123.

¹¹ *At nostri, praedae partitione acta refectisque navigiis, nobelium sociorum cadavera salientes, ignobilibus ibidem tumultis, in patriam referenda curabant* (SGD, XIV:40:11).

¹² Cf. Hellberg, 1979, p. 146 (map), 164 (note 187). Hellberg however supposes that the first part in the name indicates an original 'jarl'. Among other names beginning with 'järn', it lies near at hand to think of the village, Järnsida (1467 *på Järnsidhan*), Söderåkra parish, very close to the Danish border. According to Johansen, 1951, p. 73f, names associating to *iron door* were quite frequent in the Baltic coastal landscape, often indicating a narrow passage.

¹³ Blomkvist, 1979, p. 72. In medieval Swedish *kure* means 'watchman'.

¹⁴ Blomkvist, 2005, pp. 335-54.

¹⁵ HCL, VII:1.

¹⁶ HCL, VII:2.

¹⁷ HCL, XIV:1.

¹⁸ HCL, XIV:3.

¹⁹ HCL, XXX:1.

²⁰ HCL, VII:1.

²¹ HCL, V:2. Cf. LRC, vv. 177f, 199f; Cf. Benninghoven, 1961, p. 21f.

²² The inclination for seeking the death rather than suffering loss and captivity is witnessed also for the Lithuanians. Most famous is the suicide pact at Pilėnai in 1336, when the defenders burnt their belongings, killed women and children and offered their necks for decapitation. At least part of the execution was done by an old woman with an axe. According to a fairly contemporary author 'they did that according to their religion, and they regarded the death much easier' (Gimbutas, 1963, p. 188).

- ²³ HCL, XIV:5. According to Gimbutas (1963, p. 186f) they had protracted funeral meals and sang *raudos*, lamentation songs to help the fallen find their relatives in the kingdom of the dead. Such songs have to some extent been preserved, she claims.
- ²⁴ LRC, v. 351–3.
- ²⁵ LRC, v. 354–6.
- ²⁶ Blomkvist, 2005, pp. 403–10, 415–69.
- ²⁷ HCL, VII:1, XXX:1.
- ²⁸ When pirates are branded Estonians, it may still refer to Osilians, who of course were Estonians. I know of no evidence for other Estonian tribes to have organised sea-going fleets.
- ²⁹ RVA, 30; cf. the translations by Trillmich, 1961, and Rudberg, 1965.
- ³⁰ Ibidem.
- ³¹ *Sunt et aliae [insulae] interius, quae subiacent imperio Sueonum, quarum vel maxima est illa, quae Churland dicitur.* And furthermore: *Hanc insulam credimus in Vita sancti Ansgarii Chori nominatam, quam tunc Sueones tributo subiecerunt* (ABG, IV:16), and finally *illa ... non longe sit a Birca Sueonum* (ABG, IV:17). Independent of Rimbert, on the other hand, he adds that several other isles in the neighbourhood also belong to Sweden.
- ³² AGB, IV: 16. Svend may even have made this effort when *nuper sub Iacobo rege XII annis militavi in illis regionibus...* ‘recently he made 12 years of military service to King Jacob in those tracts (Sweden)’. AGB, IV: 21; cf. II: 73 which give the same information about Svend’s service, with the addition that he had mentioned that *Iacobo regnante christianitatem late in Sueonia diffusam esse...* (‘Christianity expanded widely in Sweden during Jacob’s rule’).
- ³³ *En er hann (Žorgnž) stóð upp, ža stóšu upp allir boendr, žeir er įšr hufdu setit... ‘annan vög er nš skaplyndi Svka-konunga, en fyrr hefir verit. Žorgnžr, fušur fašir minn, munši Eirkk Upsala-konung Emundarson ok sagši žit frį honum, at mešan hann vara léttaſta aldri, at hann hafši hvert sumar leišangr ſti ok fór til žmissa landa ok lagši undir sik Finnland ok Kirjilaland, Eisland ok Kšrland ok viša um austrhlynd ... joršborgir ok ęnnur stórvirki* (Ól. helg. k. 80).
- ³⁴ The duty to make ledung from Gotland is thus implied in this context.
- ³⁵ HCL, I:13.
- ³⁶ The territorial distribution of Lammecinus’ principality was discussed within the CCC-project by •ulkus and Auns, with – if I understand them correctly – slightly different conclusions, see Auns, ed., 2001, pp. 307–13, 345–54.
- ³⁷ LECUB, 103.

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- LECUB = *Liv-, Esth- und Curländisches Urkundenbuch nebst Regesten*. Ed. F. G. von Bunge. Reval, 1853 ff.
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- OM = *Olaus Magnus, Historia om de nordiska folken*. Med kommentar av John Granlund. 1-4. (1951) 1976.
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Straipsnis skirtas kuršių paminėjimo viduramžių rašytiniuose šaltiniuose problemai aptarti. Skandinavų sagos, Sakso Gramatiko „Gesta Danorum“ bei Livonijos kronikos – tai pagrindiniai XII–XIII a. istoriniai šaltiniai, kuriuose ginkluotų konfliktų kontekste yra minimi kuršiai bei jų laivynas.

Straipsnyje teigiama, jog XII a. kuršiai kartu su Saarelių salų estais tam tikra prasme kontroliavo vieną iš pagrindinių Baltijos jūros laivybos kelių iš Šlezvigo į Novgorodą. Straipsnio autoriaus nuomone, kuršių (kartu ir estų) aktyvumas Baltijos jūroje ypač išaugo XII a. 4–7 -ajame dešimtmeciais. Tai sietina su viduramžių Švedijos ir Danijos valstybių centrinės valdžios krize.

Autorius prieštarauja nuomonei, kad kuršiai būvę paprasčiausi jūrų plėšikai, subūrę savo laivus į galingą laivyną. Jo nuomone, kuršių laivynas buvo gerai organizuota karinė jėga, kurią galėjo suteikti tik visuomenė, kurios paraleles autorius išvelgia skandinaviškame Vikingų laikų visuomenės modelyje.

XII – XIII a. kuršių visuomenės organizacijos kilmę ir raidą iš dalies lėmė tai, jog atskiros kuršių apgyvendintos teritorijos sritys ilgą laiką priklausė Švedijos valdovų įtakos sferai. Skandinaviškojo tipo kuršių bendruomenių formoms ir santykiams atsirasti įtakos galėjo turėti tarp vietos gyventojų gyvenę skandinavų kilmės išeiviai iš Gotlando salos.

Kuršiai - Rytų
Pabaltijo vikingai

Nils Blomkvist

Santrauka