

A-52799

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Reports of the Estonian Archaeological Society 1994 (1)

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SCANDINAVIAN CONTACTS IN ESTONIA DURING THE LATE IRON AGE*

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Received: 8. 03. 1994

*Resumé, of doctoral thesis in progress at the University of Stockholm, Sweden.

Background

The Scandinavian contacts with the Baltic countries were touched upon already in the middle of the 19th century by the German professor Friedrich Kruse (Wahle 1950, 27). Since then, several scholars have dealt with this question. Among them, Birger Nerman holds an exceptional position with his publication *Die Verbindungen zwischen Skandinavien und dem Ostbaltikum in der jüngeren Eisenzeit* from 1929, in which the Scandinavian objects were presented thoroughly. Even today, this publication represents an important source for archaeologists.

According to previous research, there is a comparatively large number of objects of "Scandinavian character" among the Estonian prehistoric material. It consists

mainly of weapons, silver hoards, ornaments, mountings and, to some extent, ceramics. It has been suggested that even some types of graves hold a Scandinavian feature.

Are all of them really Scandinavian? To what extent can it be a question of copies or reproduction? During the last few years there has been a tendency to look more carefully at this question. We are more aware of different circumstances which might have an influence on the interpretation of prehistoric material (Keller 1978). In a way, we have accepted the impossibility of being objective as archaeologists. Bearing this in mind, we ought to look realistically at the political background which may have, during the last century, affected the research on both sides

of the Baltic Sea. At the moment, it is not possible to see the dimensions of this, but the end of the 1920s could have been a time when interpretation of prehistoric remains were in favour of a theory based on western contacts. Furthermore, this was met by the Scandinavian "Viking boom" of the same period. My aim, however, is not to criticize. The issue of importance is my awareness of the above mentioned circumstances in my interpretation.

Today, the situation has changed in many ways. The research work emphasizes the internal interpretation. There are requirements to get to know more about the human being behind the artefacts and the society around it. Therefore, both more demanding, as well as more comprehensive questions are being put to the archaeological material. We want to get closer to the meaning of the artefact to find out whether it could reflect e.g. power, solidarity or prestige. The ongoing development of methods within archaeological research is opening new ways all the time. We have, in other words, many possibilities to squeeze information out of the material both theoretically and practically. It is just a matter of using the available tools in the right way.

In the paragraph above, the internal interpretation was discussed. I, myself, do not believe in the two extremes, the internal and the external ones, in the interpretation of archaeological material. Both are needed and we must, as archaeologists, be aware of the consequences, if one direction predominates. If we just look at the development of society from an external angle, I am sure there will be a lot of interesting information lost, as it would be with an isolated internal approach. This appears very clear to me in my own work, where I consider both necessary, and I sense uneasiness when western and eastern scientific traditions meet each other. This is a delicate question, which has to be dealt with carefully but, at the same time, every effort has to be made to prevent misunderstandings.

When the interpretation has reached a certain level, it might be ready for further understanding. At the stage, for instance, when I have interpreted an artefact as Scandinavian, I consider it very natural to look upon the internal situation, and subsequently I ask the question: "What did this Scandinavian artefact represent in Estonia and what was the society around it like?" I cannot take it for granted

that it might have had the same meaning in different geographical areas.

The Scandinavian artefacts

In my case, in which the Scandinavian artefacts form the basis for my questions, it is of course, of great importance how I distinguish between the Scandinavian and the Estonian, domestic material. What level of certainty is acceptable? How "deep" shall I go into the artefacts? Here that which is exactly measurable is put against intuition. Similarity, parallel and influence represent essential conceptions in the interpretation. It is necessary to discuss the borderlines between them theoretically.

In many cases it is a question of handicraft and not mass production, in which human creativity must be given some space. Do areas with an obvious density of Scandinavian contacts strengthen the interpretation in favour of it being Scandinavian?

We also ought to take into consideration how the interpretation and the research work in general can meet each other in the respective countries. This is

especially the case when similar types may occur in larger areas consisting of different countries.

The easiest way out of this problem would be to base my questions on objects of "Scandinavian character". But what will the final picture look like if, for example, 39 % of the pattern-welded spearheads are thought to be of Scandinavian origin (Selirand 1985, 34)? This leads the discussion immediately further to the concepts of production and at the same time closer to an understanding of society. Does the organization within a society differ if the weapons are imported or locally produced? Both cases should demand a certain level of organization. Did some areas have more intensive contacts to the west than others and if so, why? In the very end, the whole interpretation seems to turn into an economic question based on import and local production where raw material, supply and demand require attention.

In summary, the approach in understanding the Scandinavian artefacts can be illustrated according to the enclosed chart (Fig.1), where all the boxes are needed to create a deeper picture of

the studied object. Each box contains many different possibilities, all of which are available to the archaeologist only to a certain degree.

Firstly, it is a question of distinguishing between the domestic and the Scandinavian objects ("Production or Influence Country"). In practice, this means building up a working catalogue. Secondly, the "Find Circumstances" need to be looked upon closer. This also includes studies of distribution and recurrent tendencies. Thirdly, it is a question of the "Activity" behind the artefact, i.e. whether there is any sign of trade or production. The question of activity leads automatically further to the fourth step, namely the "Meaning" (Fig.2). Behind those different steps, which enable us to reach a certain interpretation, the "Written Sources" stand as a support. The written sources can consist of anything from runestones to historical events.

Some investigations

As both weapons and silver hoards are important sources in creating a picture of the prehistoric society, I have chosen to start my investigation within these groups.

The weapons

The weapons taken into consideration will be mainly the swords, the pattern-welded spearheads and some of the axes. At the present moment, the spearheads have been studied closely and the swords and the axes only partly.

As there is an thorough publication available made by Jüri Selirand (1975) about the Estonian pattern-welded spearheads, a computer based method was found to be suitable. All different kinds of information such as type, ornamentation, pattern-welding, measurements, find circumstances, dating and distribution could be seen in relation to each other.

Some interesting spatial concentrations appeared. These tendencies could be used for further interpretation in understanding problems around import and local production.

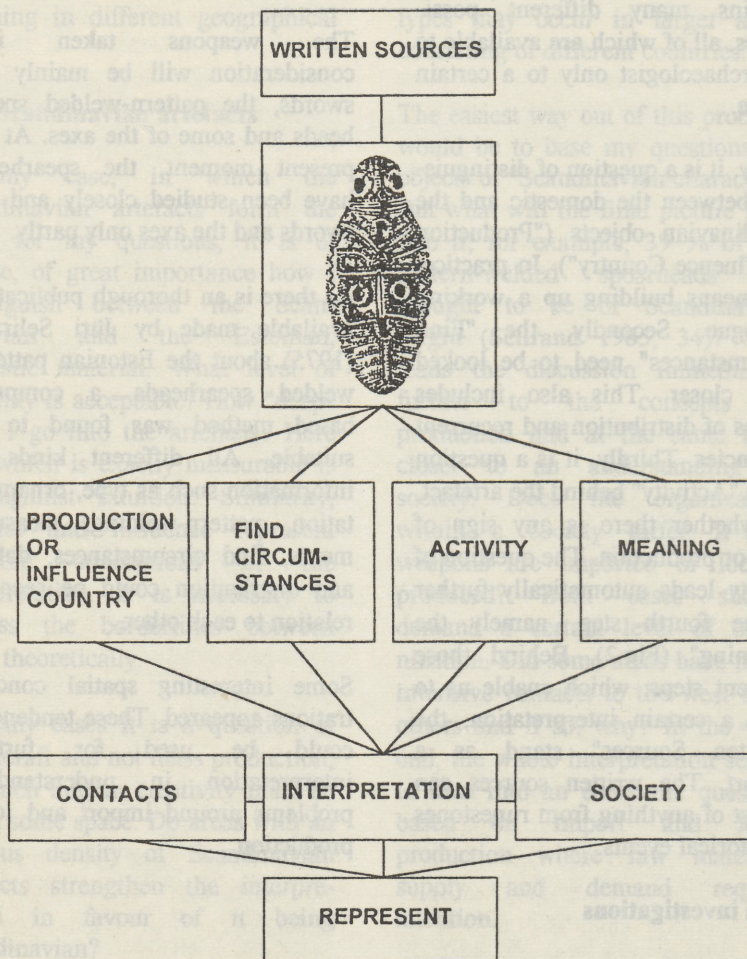


Fig. 1. A possible view of an artefact (photo of the ornament is taken from Selirand & Tönnisson 1984).

MEANING

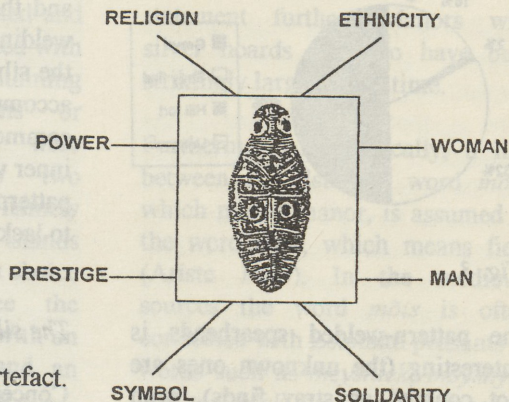


Fig. 2. The meaning of the artefact.

According to the distribution patterns, which showed both clusters of strong similarities and obvious variations, local production seems to be possible but, at the present time, it is impossible to judge to what extent. Therefore, further work, based on find combinations, has to be carried out on this question. These speculations are partly supported by a Danish investigation on Viking Age knives, where a Baltic smithy tradition is seen to have served as a model to the smiths on Bornholm (Lyngström 1993, 27).

But to create a clearer picture, the spearheads have to be looked upon from a wider perspective consisting of the countries around the Baltic Sea. The research will probably not advance any further without this approach, especially in discussions around export and import. The similarities are too strong to be interpreted within a limited area. Through this I have made clear an essential problem related to spatial limitation in understanding the Scandinavian contacts.

The relatively high percentage of stray finds (32%) (Fig.3) among

Pattern-welded spearheads
Find circumstances

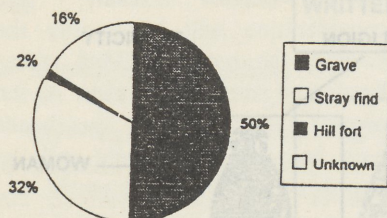


Fig. 3.

the pattern-welded spearheads is interesting (the unknown ones are not counted as stray finds), even though a greater part of them should be understood as grave finds from destroyed graves. As the stray finds, however, tend to indicate a late dating, they could perhaps to some extent be seen in connection with Henric's Chronicle where the different use of the spearheads is mentioned many times (HL, I, XII, XIII, XVII and passim). Similar information concerning e.g. the ritual of laying down the spearheads on the ground as a sign of ceasefire, can also be obtained in a capitular by Charles the Great in the beginning of the 9th century (Menghin 1980, 245).

Which position one ought to take regarding the outer or inner value

of the spearheads is another question, which arose from the computer work. The outer value is represented by the ornamentation and the inner value by the pattern welding. The strong outer value in the silver ornamented spearheads is accompanied by a relatively common pattern welding, while the inner value in the more complicated pattern-welded spearheads appears to lack special outer decoration.

The silver hoards

Concerning the silver hoards I have chosen to concentrate more on the find circumstances, while fundamental work has been carried out earlier (Creutz 1990). During autumn 1993 a smaller silver hoard project started, which has opened a collaboration between Estonia, Gotland and the University of Stockholm. The method used, which mainly means fieldwork with a metal detector, was based on Majvor Östergren's thesis from 1989. The fundamental idea of this study, which was carried out on Gotland, was to see the connection between the find place of the hoard and a possible settlement (the dwelling house). Östergren found it possible to interpret the silver hoard as an indicator of settlement.

The Gotland investigation consisted of 73 find places of silver hoards.

In the Estonian project 19 places were preliminarily investigated and of these 10 further investigated with metal detectors. Hoards containing either Scandinavian coins or Scandinavian objects were prioritized. Geographically two different areas were chosen, namely the area of Tallinn and the islands of Saaremaa and Muhu. This choice made it possible to see the differences between an area with an ongoing town foundation and an area without this phenomenon.

As the investigation was very limited and represented only about 6 % of the total known silver hoards, the following statement should be seen in relation to the percentage. No direct indications of a connection between a dwelling house and a silver hoard could be observed. On the other hand, some spatial observations were made. There seems to be a connecting link between the silver hoards and the manors. This could mean a relationship between good soils and valuable silver, which indirectly could be understood as a contact between foreigners and a group of

wealthier Estonians. Some studies made on the economy of the manors from around 1750 (Hupel 1782, 378, 403-404) strengthen this statement further. Manors with silver hoards seem to have been strikingly large at that time.

Furthermore, linguistically, a link between the Estonian word *mõis*, which means manor, is assumed in the word *moo*, which means field (Ariste 1965). In the medieval sources the word *mõis* is often connected with Estonian peasants in words such as *meysnick*, *moysnyck* and *moisnick* etc. Those names are often related to farms which are situated separately from the rest of the village. Also a social meaning seems to have been connected to this word, quite early used in relation to the farms of the elite (Ligi 1968, 21-28). Herbert Ligi can also see a continuation backwards in the use of the word *mõis*. After the conquest the word was used for the manors of the Germans. Additionally, the Germans often built their estates on the same places where the local elite had lived before (*op. cit.*, 23). This means that the location of the present manors possible could be traced back to the beginning of the 13th century. This is a source,

which is undoubtedly of great value for further investigations of the hoards.

The Estonian hoards are in general relatively late compared to the Gotlandic ones, which could allow some speculations on the connection between Christianity and the hiding of the hoards. Even in this case Henric's Chronicle gives a picture of the situation, in telling about how the land owners were robbed and forced to leave their land and houses in a great hurry (HL, X). Could some of the hoards have been hidden on these occasions?

Further investigation will be carried out in the near future. My aim is to try to focus on the Scandinavian contacts in the silver hoards based on a computer work, where Evald Tõnisson's research on the Estonian hoards from 1962 will be of great value to me. Also the forthcoming work by Arkadi Molvõgin will be of invaluable help.

Finally it can be observed that the importance of neighbouring countries such as Finland, Latvia and the area of Ladoga is increasing as my thesis advances. The work takes more and more the shape of a Baltic Sea project. This means a

serious problem as regards the general limitation. Perhaps research carried out on a Baltic level would be both more relevant and appropriate. This is something that will be seen in the near future.

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SKANDINAAVIA KONTAKTID EESTIGA NOOREMAL RAUAAJAL

Taust

Varasema uurimistöö kohaselt on Eesti arheoloogilises materjalis suhteliselt rohkesti nn. skandinaaviapäraseid esemeid. Peaasjalikult kuulub viimaste hulka relvi, aardeleide, ehteid, vööosi ning mõnevõrra ka keraamikat. Samuti on skandinaaviapäraseid jooni oletatud isegi mõnel kalmel.

On need kõik tõesti Skandinaavia päritoluga? Mil määral tuleb kõne alla kopeerimine ja reprodutseerimine? Arheoloogilises kirjan-duses võib viimastel aastatel täheldada tendentsi läheneda seda laadi küsimustele ettevaatlikumalt, kui see oli kombeks varem. Uurijad on nüüd rohkem teadlikud erinevatest asjaoludest, mis võivad mõjutada esiajalooliste materjalide tõlgendamist (Keller 1978).

Olukord on tänaseks muutunud mitmes suhtes. Uurimistöö rõhutab tõlgendamist "seestpoolt". Võib täheldada taotlust püüda rohkem teada saada esemete taga peituva inimese ning ühiskonna kohta,

milles see inimene elas. Seetõttu on materjalile esitatavad küsimused muutunud mitmekülsemaks ja nõudlikumaks.

Üha uusi teid avab uurimistöö meetodite areng. Kõige selle tulemusena on meil palju enam nii teoreetilisi kui ka praktilisi võimalusi, kuidas materjalist informatsiooni kätte saada.

Autor ei usu, et arheoloogilise materjali tõlgendamisel oleks vaja valida kahe äärmuse, n.-ö. sisemise ja välimise vahel. Vajalikud on mõlemad ning arheoloogidena peaksime teadlikud olema nendest tagajärgedest, milleni viib ühe külje ületähtsustamine.

Skandinaaviapärased esemed

Käesoleval juhtumil, kus materjalile esitatavate küsimuste lähtekoha moodustavad skandinaaviapärased leiud, on mõistagi väga oluline see, kuidas teha vahet Skandinaavia ning Eesti päritoluga esemete vahel.

Millist tõepärasuse astet võib siinjuures aktsepteerida? Kui sügavale peaks leidude uurimisel minema? Siinjuures on vastamisi kaks aspekti: ühel pool täpselt mõõdetavad tunnused ning teisel pool intuitsioon. Olulisi kontseptsioone esindavad tõlgendamisel mõisted 'sarnasus', 'paralleel' ning 'mõju'. Viimaste tähenduse täpsustamine eeldab teoreetilist lähene-mist.

Lihtsaim viis antud küsimustele vastuse leidmiseks on see, kui võtta aluseks mõiste 'skandinaavia-päraseks objektid'. Ent milline näeb välja lõpptulemus, kui näiteks arvatakse (Selirand 1985, 34), et 39 % Eesti damaskeeritud odaotstest on pärit Skandinaaviast? Siit jõuame otsekohe toodangu kontseptsioonide juurde ning ühtaegu lähemale ühiskonna mõistmisele. Kas ühiskonna organisatsioon on erinev, kui relvad toodetakse kohapeal või imporditakse?

Uurimistööst

Kuna nii relvad kui ka hõbeaarded on oluline allikas esiajaloolisest ühiskonnast pildi loomisel, siis on autor alustanud uurimistööd just nendest leiuliikidest.

Relvad

Vaatluse alla on võetud eelkõige mõõgad, damaskeeritud odaotsad ja mõningad kirved. Käesolevaks hetkeks on lähemalt uuritud odaotsi, ülejäänud relvi aga üksnes osaliselt.

Kuna damaskeeritud odaotstest on olemas Jüri Seliranna põhjalik uurimus (1975), siis osutus sobivaks analüüsida saadud andmeid arvuti abil. Materjali levikus tulid ilmsiks mõningad huvitavad kontsentratsioonid. Vastavalt levikupildile, milles ilmnes nii suuri kokkulangevusi kui ka lahknevusi, näib damaskeeritud odaotste kohalik tootmine olevat võimalik, ent käesoleval hetkel ei ole selle ulatuse üle võimalik veel otsustada. Neid spekulatsioone toetavad teatud määral Taani viikingiaegsete nuga-de uurimise tulemused ning arvamus, et Balti sepatöö traditsioonid olid Bornholmi seppade jaoks eeskujuks (Lyngström 1993, 27).

Et saada selgemat ettekujutust, tuleb odaotsi vaadelda laiemas perspektiivis, võttes arvesse kogu Lääne-mere ruumi. Sarnasused on selleks liiga suured, et neid saaks tõlgendada ainult piiratud ala materjali alusel.

Hõbeaarded

Hõbeaarete puhul peab autor vajalikuks rohkem keskenduda mõningatele nende leidmisega seotud asjaoludele, kuna aarete endiga on ta juba varem põhjalikumalt tegelnud (Creutz 1990).

1993. aasta algul tehti algust väiksema hõbedaprojektiga, mis avas koostöö Eesti, Ojamaa ja Stockholmi vahel. Ojamaa aarete varasema uurimuse lähtekohaks oli seose selgitamine leiukoha ja asula (elamu) vahel. Majvor Östergren pidas 73 aardeleiu põhjal võimalikuks käsitleda neid asula indikaatorina.

Eesti projekti puhul uuriti esialgselt 19 leiukohta ning neist kümnel viidi läbi otsingud metallidetektoriga. Prioriteet kuulus neile aaretele, mis sisaldasid Skandinaavia münte või muid sealse päritoluga esemeid. Märgitagu muuhulgas, et aarded näivad olevat seotud mõisate levikuga, mis võib tähendada seost viljaka pinnase ja hõbedaleidude vahel. Kaudselt võib seda nähtust tõlgendada kui tõendit vööramaalaste ning jõukate eestlaste vahelisest kontaktist.

1750. aasta paiku teostatud mõisamajanduse uuringud tugevdavad seda järeldust veelgi (Hupel 1782, 378, 403-404). Mõisad, kust on leitud aardeid, olid nimetatud ajal hämmastavalt suured. Sõnal 'mõis' näib sotsiaalne tähendus olevat olnud juba ammu, sest seda tarvitati ka kohaliku vallutuse-eelse eliidi majapidamise kohta (Ligi 1968, 21-28).

Autori eesmärk on püüda keskenduda aaretes kajastuvatele Skandinaavia kontaktidele, kasutades andmete arvutitöötlust. Siinjuures pakuvad suurt abi ka Evald Tõnissoni ja Arkadi Molvõgini uurimused.

Lõpuks olgu märgitud, et töö edenedes kasvab uurimuse jaoks selliste naaberalade, nagu Soome, Läti ja Laadoga piirkonna tähtsus. Üha enam võtab see käsitus Läänemere projekti ilme, milline lähenemisviis peaks olema ka ajakohasem. Siit tulenevad aga tööle asetatud piire silmas pidades nii mõnedki tõsised probleemid, mis tuleb lahendada lähitulevikus.

Tõlkinud
Priit Ligi †