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SYMBOLISM OF MEDIEVAL SWORDS FROM THE TERRITORY OF
LATVIA DURING THE 11TH–13TH CENTURIES

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Słowa kluczowe: miecze typu kurońskiego, symbolika broni, średniowiecze, bronioznawstwo

Archaeological weapons, including swords, can be located between such groups of artifacts as tools, whose forms change slowly, and jewelry, which change more quickly and are more influenced by fashion, are the most dynamic in development. On the other hand, weapons have always been a reflection of the most advanced technologies available to certain societies. Swords in archaeological records are one of the most significant types of weapons, which can reflect more aspects of the past than other types of archaeological artifacts.

Traditionally the typological method as well as mapping of the geographical distribution are used to track the evolution of the forms of artifacts. Shapes of medieval swords have been a source of inspiration for various typologies and classifications (Petersen 1919; Кирпичников 1966; Kazakevičius 1996; Oakeshott 2007).

Swords take a significant place in the archaeological record of Latvia during the early medieval period and are a visible part of the material culture of the inhabitants of territory of Latvia, which at that time consists of several ethno-linguistic groups of Balts and Baltic Finns living near Riga gulf, but most of all Western Balts – Couronians (Cours, in Latvian: *kurši*) living in the western part of modern day Latvia in Kurzeme (Kurland) peninsula (LSV, pp. 297–298).

The use of swords can be traced in the territory of Latvia already in the Late Bronze Age (Atgāzis 2002, p. 351), but finds of this weapons are extremely rare until the start of the Viking Age. There is information about 80 swords and sword-parts and almost 50 sword scabbard chapes from the Viking Age from the territory of Latvia. They represent all main forms of the Viking Age swords.

Although quality swords at that time were a relatively rare find in the whole of Europe, maybe apart from the territories of Norway and Sweden, it can be suggested that the usage of swords in the territory of Latvia during the Viking Age was much wider, which can be suggested judging only from burial evidences: already the first Viking Age sword finds in the territory of Latvia are recorded in grave inventories. From this it follows that rare artifact became a usual part of traditional burial practices, this also somewhat indicates that those artifacts must have been much more widespread, than it is possible to judge basing on finds alone (Tomsons 2007, p. 81).

The second part of the 11th century is reflected by a huge increase of sword finds. Crusades against local pagan (heathen) people of Latvia and Estonia started a century later than in Palestine (end of 12th century). During this time, spanning from the end of the Viking Age to the beginning of the 13th century, societies of Balts and Baltic Finns of Eastern Baltic developed a remarkable warrior culture, and weapons, especially swords, became an even more significant part of their material culture (Šnē 2008, p. 187).

In Latvia and Estonia the time between the end of the 12th century to the end of the 13th century (1290 is a commonly accepted date) is a bloody transition to late medieval period through the Baltic Crusades, mostly inspired by German crusaders (also, in Estonia, by Danes), which resulted in the forming of the Confederation of Livonia in the end of the 13th century (Šterns 2002, pp. 156, 383). Weapons and swords were a common find. During this time, which formally is the second part of the Latvian Late Iron Age (end of the 11th–12th centuries), due to a relatively small number of written sources, at least respecting the 11th–12th centuries (LSV, pp. 293–296), some researchers tend to call it the early medieval or proto-historical period (ILA, p. 66).

There are almost 300 evidences of swords dated to the 11th–13th centuries in the territory of modern day Latvia: 12 types and 18 subtypes of double edged swords were in use (fig. 1). There are more than 100 specimens that can be regarded as Jan Petersen's (1919) type T swords or their partial local developments. Author of the current research divides them into four larger subtypes (fig. 1:1–4).

There are also approximately 180 evidences of other sword types – about half of them are swords with straight or slightly curved cross-guards and single piece iron pommels – most characteristic forms of swords of the so-called Age of Crusades from Western Europe, beautifully described by Ewart Oakeshott in his *Records of the Medieval Sword* (Oakeshott 2007).

One of the most interesting and numerous sword type in the early medieval period from the territory of Latvia is a special type of a double edged sword, characteristic for the whole Eastern Baltic region, which is known as

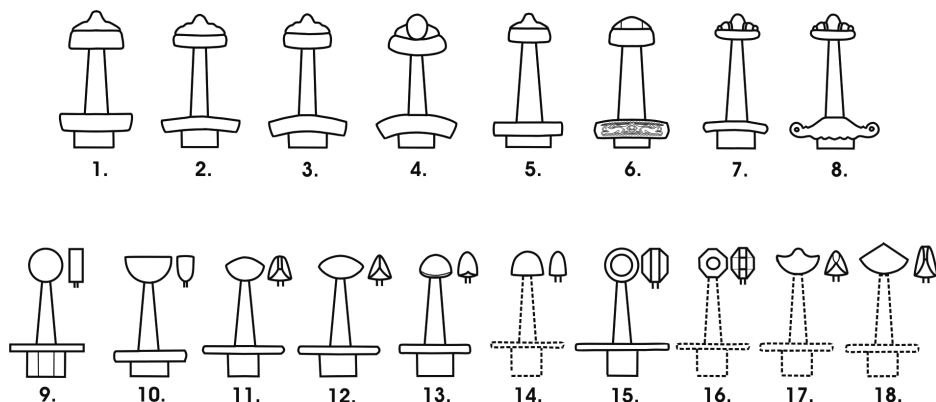


Fig. 1. Classification of the double-edged sword types from the territory of Latvia in the 11th-13th century: 1-4 further variations of the Viking Age T type swords; 5-8 subtypes of Couronian swords; 9 - swords with disc-shaped pommels; 10 - swords with saddle-shaped pommels; 11-12 - swords with A type pommels; 13-14 - swords with B and B-1 type pommels; 15 - swords with I type pommels; 16 - swords with I-1 type pommels; 17 - swords with D type pommels; 18 - swords with E type pommels (11-18 - pommel types according to E. Oakeshott) (drawing A. Tomsons)

the “Couronian” sword, the name given by Latvian archaeologist Eduards Šturms in his article in 1936, based on the finds from Latvia (Šturms 1936). This sword type carries more symbolic evidence than all the other types of the mentioned period and region, and thus will be the main subject of interest in this article.

Bernt von Mühlen names them “Kurlandic” (*Kurländische Schwerter*) swords (after the Kurland - *Kurzeme* in Latvian - peninsula in the Western Latvia and modern culturally-historical district with strong local identity and consciousness still today) (Mühlen 1975, pp. 32-35). Anatoli Kirpichnikov incorporates these swords into his classification's type I (Киричников 1966, p. 53). This example is followed by Estonian archaeologist Mati Mandel (1991, p. 120). Lithuanian researcher R. Volkaite-Kulikauskiene didn't mark them outside the typological traits of the Viking Age swords of Petersen's type T (Volkaite-Kulikauskiene 1964, pp. 208-210). The swords found in the territories inhabited by the Balts (modern day Latvia, Lithuania and former Eastern Prussia) were examined in a monograph and a separate article by Lithuanian archaeologist V. Kazakevičius and were named “T-1” type swords (Kazakevičius 1996, pp. 53-58; Tomsons 2008, p. 85).

It must be said that since last publications, the number of known examples of Couronian swords has largely increased. In the monograph *IX-XIII a. baltų kalavijai* (eng. *Swords of the Balts*) published in 1996 there were 40

swords of this type used as a source material and examined (Kazakevičius 1996), but in an article published a year later, which was also dedicated to the Couronian swords, already 64 finds were used as examples (Kazakevičius 1997). Information about finds from the territory of Latvia were provided by Latvian archaeologist Māris Atgāzis, however, a significant number of the fragments of those swords were still left outside researchers' consideration (Atgāzis 2002). Even after a recent article by the author of this report (Tomsons 2008, pp. 85–86), information about more than 20 new finds have been acquired, mostly thanks to the activities of treasure hunters, and the summarizing conclusions can be revisited again. Today the known number of the finds of this type in Eastern Europe reaches almost 150 examples.

Couronian swords are characterized by slightly curved lower and upper cross guards; they are always made from bronze or another copper alloy. Their pommels could be three, five or seven-lobbed. Their blades are always double-edged, their length reaches from 85 to 100 cm, their maximum width is about 5,5 cm. The fuller is often slightly narrower than fullers of sword blades of previous centuries. There are various combinations of sword hilt details with different ornamentation types (fig. 2), which allows their division into several subtypes. This requires a more detailed examination.

Hilt parts of Couronian swords are richly decorated with different ornamental motifs. Emergence and possible symbolic meaning of those motifs were briefly sketched in V. Kazakevičius' article, but were not examined more closely (Kazakevičius 1997, p. 118). Rich decoration with various ornamental motifs is a valuable source for illustrating spiritual beliefs, being alive in the minds of the Baltic warriors at the end of Prehistory and at the dawn of the statehood before forceful christianization and conquest by crusaders during the 13th century.

The key to understand the origin of those weapons is to analyse ornamental motifs of the their hilts, because most of the investigated blades bare Western European inscriptions, which allows to conclude that they were mostly imported; on the other hand, hilt details could have been of local production, utilizing local ornamenting styles (fig. 2:3). This allows a large insight into the symbolic aspects of the local past.

Origin of an ornament takes roots in the minds of men – the place of collecting experience and observations. Thus, ornament is a reflection of the different concepts of the outer world through individual experience and tradition. Decoration styles can also be used as means for dating archaeological objects in association with historical decorative styles. Ornamentation motifs used on the Couronian swords can be divided to two groups – international and local. If interpreted correctly, they can reflect a wide spectrum



Fig. 2. Couronian swords: 1 – Talsi Vilkuņģu lake cemetery (TNMM 291); 2 – Užavas Silmalciems (VVM 6309); 3 – Alsungas Kalniņi, grave 20 (A 11722:26) (photo A. Tomsons)

of spiritual beliefs in the context of surrounding reality of the time. Swords of the 12th–13th centuries from the territory of Latvia, especially Couronian type swords, are a fruitful source for research of symbolic aspects of the past; they unite elements of different cultures.

The most perceptible level is the form of the swords and the details themselves. In the “barbaric” societies, lots of objects of material culture are spiritualized. An ornamented artifact becomes more personal, “real” (Щеглова 2010, p. 520). Couronian swords have several traits illustrating the point to such assumption. They possess both plastic hilt details (ends of the lower guards in the form of animal heads) of animal style (fig. 4), as well as a regular geometric ornament (fig. 2:3). It’s possible to make their classifications also basing on the techniques of their production (riveting the hilt details or casting them), but the ornament must be considered the primary criteria, as it is uniting all subtypes (fig. 1:5–8).

International (or adopted) decoration motifs of the Couronian swords mostly derive from Romanesque art of the 12th century. These are wave-like lines (fig. 2:2) as well as different types of an “endless knot” motif, which is mostly placed in the central part of the pommel. The motif most widespread on Couronian swords is the ring and crossed line motif (fig. 2:1). Also, several lower guards of Couronian swords are ornamented with complicated plant

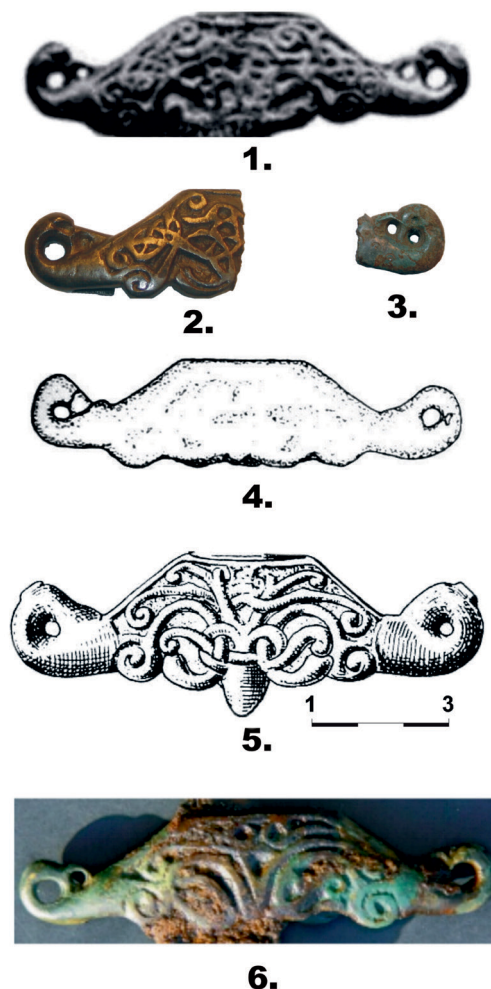


Fig. 3. Couroonian swords' lower guards with stylized animal head motif: 1 – Zlēku Pasilciems (ГИМ. 35129, оп. 65/1422), 2 – Kazdanga (A 8491:22) (photo A. Tomsons), 3 – Bīriņu Mežšauti (A 13377:5) (photo A. Tomsons), 4 – Навахрудак (after Плавінски 2006, р. 77), 5 – Lūmandu Leedru (AI K 24:44) (photo A. Tomsons), 6 – Ziru Sembas (1–5 photo/drawing A. Tomsons; 6 – after *Internet...* 2011)

(herbal) ornament (fig. 3). It has direct analogies in Gotland, for example, on the sarcophagus from Ardre church near the eastern coast of Gotland (fig. 4).

Some crossguards have such a decoration accompanied with the stylized animal head motif. A possible transition of this motif is reflected in the map of swords with animal head motif distribution near the Baltic Sea – main areas are the lower reaches of the river Venta and Saaremaa Island in Estonia (fig. 5).



Fig. 4. Fragment of the Ardre sarcophagus (after *Internet...* [n/d])

Baltic animal style appears already during the Migration Era (Bliujiene 2000, p. 110). The author assumes that here possibly Scandinavian tradition had its influence with a concept of the serpent, and the convergence of both Baltic and Scandinavian traditions and concepts happened then. There are two subtypes of animal head forms visible – one is with a round head, other with a visible “ear” and a straightened “snout” – perhaps a stylized version of a horsehead, often doubled (horse is a significant animal in Baltic spiritual beliefs, it is the bringer of Sun, a symbol of spring, power, warrior’s closest comrade; especially in Prussia and Lithuania, there are lots of horse burials). Setting the compositions in a doublet seems to be an important local tradition – two stylized, crossed corn stalks are traditionally associated with Latvian Jumis, who embodied luck and fertility.

Couronian swords are usually found together with either of two types of sword scabbard chapes – one with a double bird motif and the other with the world tree symbol. Both these types are of local origin – there is a hard evidence in a several semi-finished specimens and some cast off examples (fig. 6).

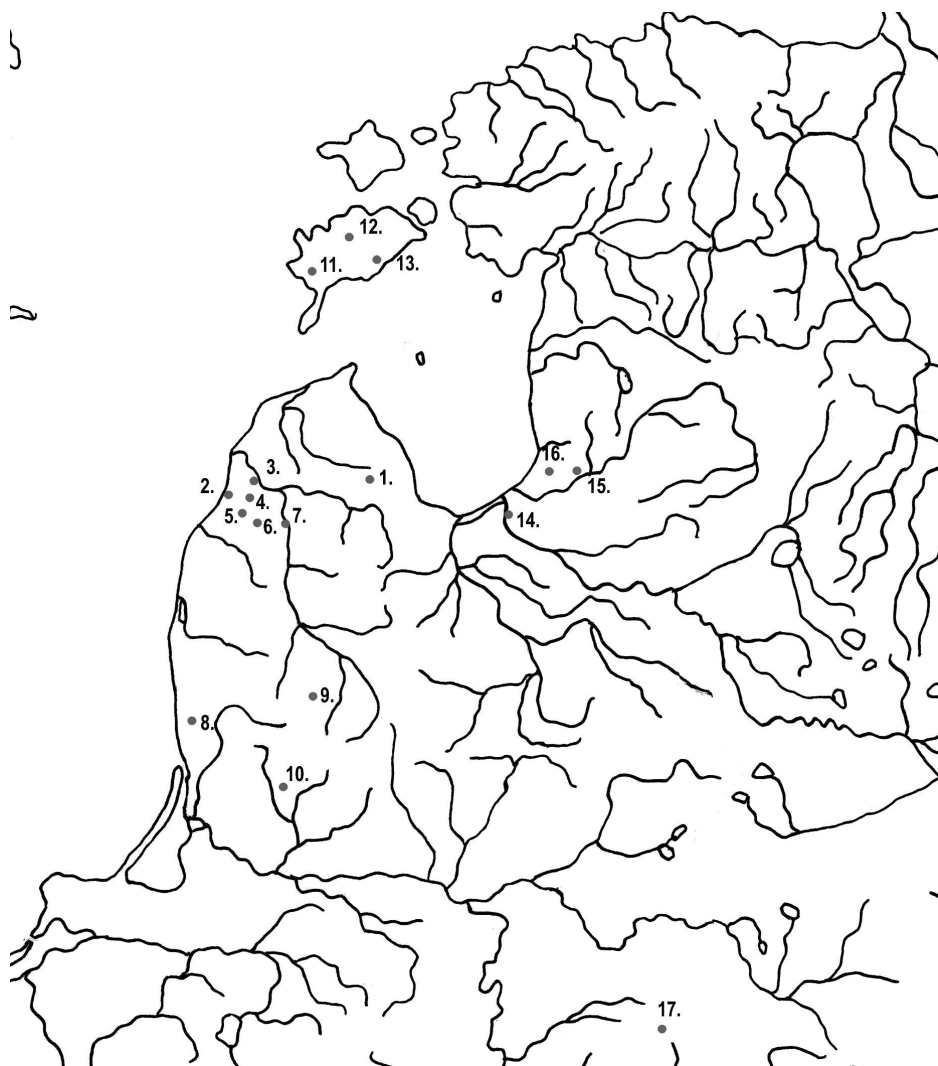


Fig. 5. Distribution of Curonian swords with animal head decoration on the lower guards in the Eastern Baltic: 1 - Lībagu Sārāji; 2 - Zirū Sembas; 3 - Zlēku Pasilciems; 4 - Lielīvande; 5 - Alsungas Kalniņi; 6 - Kazdanga; 7 - Raņķu Kapenieki; 8 - Anduliai; 9 - Telšiai; 10 - Žasinas; 11 - Lūmandu Leedru; 12 - Paju; 13 - Kogula; 14 - Doles Rauši settlement; 15 - Krimuldas Tālēni; 16 - Bīriņu Mežšauti; 17 - Навахрудак (drawing A. Tomsons)

Animal heads found on the Curonian swords are similar to many animal head forms from Scandinavia, which allows the assumption that their origin can be found there, and that initially it could have been a representation of the dragon/snake from the Scandinavian mythology. Different snake-like motifs in Scandinavia were known already in the Migration Era (Nylén, Lamm 1988, p. 31). Motif of the snake/dragon is widely reflected in the art of

the so-called Vendel era artifacts. Best known examples are the decorative eye-brows of helmets originating from this culture (*Internet...* 2010).

The double animal motif is known already in the ancient Celtic art (Szabó 1989, pp. 120, 122, 124). Starting from the 7th century, several memorial stones were being covered with the double-horse motif (Nylén, Lamm 1988, p. 43). During the Viking Age, animal head decoration develops further and is visible on the artefacts from the Oseberg ship burial (Astrup, Christensen 1993, p. 142). V. Žulkus regards the brooch from Hedeby as a prototype for the Baltic animal style. He believes that this realistic image of the beast could serve as an inspiration for the earliest objects in the lands of the Balts (Žulkus 1997, p. 179). Also, a snake motif can be found on the guards of the swords from the end of the Viking Era (Marek 2004, Pl. 22:A).

The world of the Balts during the 5th–6th centuries met the influence of the European art styles of the Migration Period, and several of them can be traced since the 5th century (Bliujiene 2000, p. 110). A. Bluijiene gives a large historiographical review of this style in her research (Bliujiene 1999, pp. 56–64). In fact, some similarities to the decorations of Couronian swords (knot motifs) can already be found in the Migration Era Germanic ornamentation (Ørsnes 1969, p. 78, Pl. 5:e). B. Vaska mentions that the origin of this motif must be looked for in the Germanic traditions, where it initially can be seen as a head of a bird, in time transforming into a dragon head. This author agrees to A. Vijs, who believes that part of the finds without the “ears” are closer to the snake/dragon motif, the rest – to the “horsehead” (Vaska 2003, pp. 44–45).

During the Late Iron Age, animal head motif in the material culture of the Balts and their neighbours mostly appears in jewelry – brooches and bracelets (*Baltų menas...* 2009, p. 149). Also, a double animal motif is visible on sword scabbard chapes – the two-bird figures (Asaris 1994, pp. 22–23). In some situations the chape with bird figures was decorated with the circular (dot/eye) ornament (fig. 6:4).

The dragon motif in Scandinavian art has been widely analyzed. In Norse mythology the world serpent (*Jörmungandr*, *Midgårdsormen*) surrounds *Midgard* – the world of men, though the other serpent (*Nidhogg*, *Níðhögg*) tears the roots of the world tree (Johansen 1996, pp. 83–104). Without a doubt, it could be regarded as one of the most powerful symbols of the age.

All this means that different manifestations of the animal style were widespread in the Eastern Baltic region in the 11th–12th centuries, and the style’s reflection in weapon decoration was only natural.

The other motif visible on the crossguards of the Couronian swords is the head of a horse motif. Already since the Bronze Age, the horse has been a significant domestic animal and in beliefs of lots of peoples it has been a sa-



Fig. 6. Semi-finished and cast off sword scabbard chapes from the territory of Latvia from the 11th–13th centuries: 1 – Sesavas Eži (KPM 1993:29); 2 – Mārtiņšala settlement (VI 127:2073); 3–4 – Lībagu Sārāji, grave 39 (A12820:433, A 12820:434) (photos A. Tomsons)

cred one. Historic meaning of the horse in the territory of Latvia is reviewed by F. Siliņš (1922, pp. 730–733) and K. Zalts (1928, pp. 457–538). Evidence for the cult of the horse in archaeological records of Latvia are reviewed by G. Zemītis (2004, pp. 86–102).

During the Late Iron Age, horse became a symbol and attribute of wealthy warriors (ibidem, p. 96). Four graves with Couronian swords have horse gear as grave goods. Several of the finds have both explicit “snouts” and “ears” (fig. 7:3,5).

Horse and warfare were interconnected tightly up to the 20th century. During war, mobility was of great significance. The fact that some of the analyzed swords were possessed by riders is evidenced by the finds in Lībagu Sārāji grave 25 (bronze spurs), Raņķu Kapenieki, grave 28 (bridle binding, A 7635:11), Alsungas Kalniņi, grave 20 (iron spur), grave 21 (snaffle-bit, A 11723:13). In the cemetery of Raņķu Kapenieki, out of 37 excavated burials, remains of six swords were found, two of them with a harness. In Lībagu Sārāji cemetery, out of 46 investigated burials, harnesses were found in at least 15 graves, but both a horse gear and a sword – in nine. In Alsungas Kalniņi cemetery, out of 35 investigated burials, swords and sword parts were found in 15 graves, 10 specimens together with horse trappings.

Written sources replenish archaeological data. Adam of Bremen, when writing about Couronians around the year 1080, mentions that they possess “lots of gold and the best horses” (*equi optimi*) (Zeids 1992, p. 14).

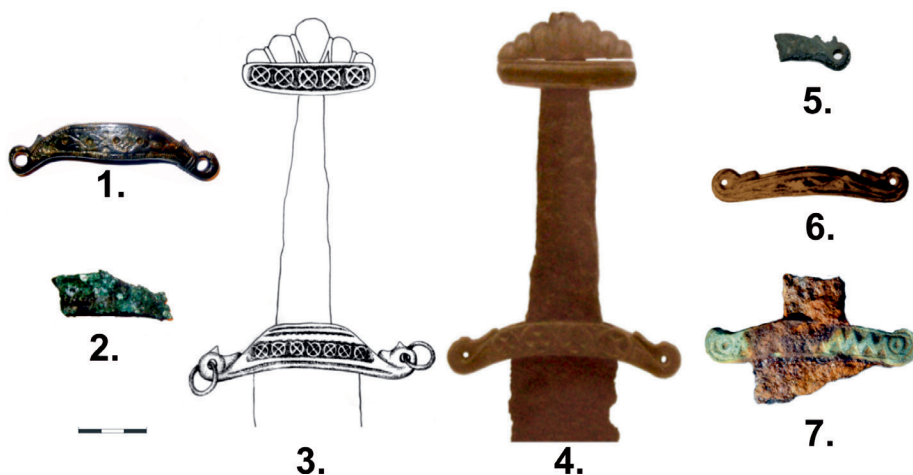


Fig. 7. Couronian swords with “horsehead” decoration: 1 – Alsungas Kalniņi, grave 21, 2 – Alsungas Kalniņi, stray find, 3 – Krimuldas Tālēni, 4 – Žasinas, 5 – Raņķu Kapenieki, grave 28, 6 – Zirū Sembas (3–6: without scale) (1–5 photos/drawing A. Tomsons; 6 – after *Internet...* 2011a)

The use of horses was widely reflected in written sources of the 13th century illustrating the Baltic crusades. It's visible that they were used by all the indigenous people and ethnic groups. Estonian cavalry (AH, 00543) and the use of saddles (AH, 01127) are mentioned in the Livonian Rhymed Chronicle. Horses are said to be present during the fight at Tartu (AH, 02128). A horse is mentioned in the forces of warring Sambians (AH, 03747), it is also used as an offering (AH, 03886). The chronicle also mentions 2500 horses as the spoils of war (AH, 01842) and as a part of the attack group of Lithuanian king Mindaugas near Embote hillfort in Southern Couronia (AH, 02509, 02584). Horses as a part of Lithuanian armies are mentioned several times (AH, 02622), both as Curonian spoils of war and as allies of the Order (AH, 02673, 03012), and even as a part of the offering of the Christians (AH, 03406). In the Chronicle of Henry of Livonia, horses are mentioned numerous times – as means of transportation, as spoils of war (IH, IX:4. X:8) and even as a tool for divination (in a so-called “trial of Gods”) (IH, I:10).

The assumption that it is a horsehead that is visible on different sword-parts is evidenced by analogies in jewelry of the Balts of the 11th–13th century. Last examples of animal style in jewelry in Curonian lands dates to the 15th century (Vijups 1994, p. 126).

Therefore, it can be concluded that the presence of horses in Eastern Baltic during the 11th–13th centuries was common, due to their importance in agriculture, communication and warfare. The use of these animals' head

motif in the decoration of sword-parts is, therefore, understandable, and, additionally, it aligned with the traditions of the widespread and previously known animal style.

Without a doubt, sword research can provide a significant insight in the various aspects of the past, as classification, chronology, issues of manufacture, practical use, ethnic and social interpretations, and even some reflection of the mentality of a warrior of the Iron Age, as well as semantic details and explanations of the sword ornamentation.

Analysis of archaeological records of the individual art and set of skills of blacksmiths and jewellers, reflected in their production of different complicated metal artifact types, allows us to conclude that the skills of the most local craftsmen weren't below average. Theoretically, they should have been able to produce high quality double-edged swords, if they had had access to good raw materials (iron with a high carbon content), as well as equipment. These possibilities can be substantiated also by the finds of similar tools in the Western Europe. However, for these workshops to survive, a large social structure in the society would have been needed, able to secure regular and viable demand for their products, which most believably was not possible in full scale in the decentralized societies, where the warfare did not have a systematic character. It can be concluded that at least part of the sword production took place in the Couronian territory, where imported blades from Western Europe were supplemented with locally made hilt elements.

The Liv settlements in the lower reaches of the Daugava River form a micro-region of exchange and trade, through which the most part of the imported weapons were distributed further in the territory of Latvia, especially during the Viking Age. From this region several evidences of local production of hilt parts (Daugmale proto-town) and casting of scabbard chapes (Mārtiņsala settlement, fig. 6:2) during later centuries come.

Statistical analysis reflects a significant increase in the sword finds starting with the 12th century. From the latter half of the 11th–13th centuries period, there is a fourfold increase in the number of finds of swords, and a triple increase in the number of scabbard chapes. This reflects not just the economic availability of swords, but also – in a certain manner – some societal processes, when local warrior elites and emerging aristocracy strengthened their positions through trade and warfare during the end of the Eastern Baltic Iron Age. Quality weapons, especially swords, were the key in the positioning of the societal structure, as well as of the status of the individual.

Swords in the Late Iron Age and the Early Medieval Period in the territory of Latvia were an inherent feature of the material culture of local population, which – in a certain context – allows to grasp the particular symbolic

aspects of their ideology to some extent. It is reflected both in burial customs and the semantic content of ornamental decorations placed on weapons, especially swords.

Forming of decorative art on any material object in the Late Iron Age could suggest its sacralization, thus, a shift in the importance of the artefact. Swords and their accessories, which were decorated with geometric ornamentation and several animal style motifs, were widely spread throughout the eastern shores of the Baltic Sea; in addition, the tradition of destroying burial inventory possibly suggests that these weapons became a certain symbol, reflection of the warrior ideology, manifestation of belonging to a particular section of society, an aspect of material culture reflecting group identity.

Distribution of several sword types (especially the Couronian swords) in the Eastern Baltic can be considered as an over-ethnic expression and evidence of the existence of particular societal groups at the end of the Iron, with possibly large similarities in their ideology, despite the different languages and ethnic origin. These similarities were mostly based on a similar lifestyle (trade and piracy), which was influenced by joined geographic location and access to the sea. Also, historical written sources have attested to the similarities between lifestyle (warfare and trade) of Couronians and Estonians of Saaremaa Island even after the beginning of the Crusades of the 13th century.

The high militarization level of the society, sharp understanding of prestige and rights of honour, as well as rites of passage of the active individuals mentioned in the written sources of 13th century are highlighted by finds of highly artistic and valuable armament. The use of this armament was still partially based on the mythological thinking (damage through burial practices), which not only illustrates a difficult path to the early statehood in the territory of Latvia from the Prehistory to the Middle Ages, but also depicts swords as a multidimensional historical and archaeological source of the wider Baltic region context.

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STRESZCZENIE

SYMBOLIKA ŚREDNIOWIECZNYCH MIECZY Z TERYTORIUM ŁOTWY W XI–XIII WIEKU

Miecze zajmują ważne miejsce wśród wczesnośredniowiecznych znalezisk na Łotwie. Są one również widoczną częścią kultury materialnej mieszkańców terenów dzisiejszej Łotwy w okresie od IX do XIII w. Użycie pierwszych mieczy jest poświadczane już w późnej epoce brązu, jednak ich znaleziska do czasu epoki najazdów wikingów są niezwykle rzadkie. Największy przyrost znalezisk mieczy na Łotwie notuje się od 2. poł. XI w., kiedy to rozpoczynają się krucjaty przeciw pogańskim mieszkańcom dzisiejszych terenów Łotwy i Estonii. W okresie od końca epoki najazdów wikingów aż do początków XIII w. społeczności Bałtów i Finów zamieszkujące wschodnie wybrzeża Morza Bałtyckiego stworzyły nadzwyczajną kulturę wojowników. Jednym z bardziej znaczących elementów tej kultury były miecze. Spośród nich najbardziej interesującym i zarazem liczny typ mieczy na terenie Łotwy we wczesnym średniowieczu był tzw. miecz kuroński. Broń ta była charakterystyczna dla całego obszaru wschodnio-bałtyckiego. Typ ten uosabia najbardziej symboliczne aspekty wszystkich mieczy dla rozważanego czasu i regionu. Tej broni jest też poświęcona zasadnicza część niniejszego artykułu. Elementy rękojeści mieczy kurońskich były zazwyczaj bardzo bogato zdobione różnego rodzaju motywami. Chociaż przebadane pod kątem występujących napisów głównie tych mieczy wskazują na ich import z terenów zachodnioeuropejskich, to jednak części oprawy były najprawdopodobniej wytwarzane na miejscu. Motywy zdobiące rękojeści mieczy kurońskich można podzielić na dwie grupy: ponadregionalną (międzynarodowy) i lokalną. Elementami zaadoptowanymi z XII-wiecznej sztuki romańskiej były prawdopodobnie motywy roślinne i faliste. Z rodzimym wytwórstwem należy powiązać pojawiający się także na miejscowej biżuterii ornament w postaci koncentrycznych kręgów oraz szewronu. Sztuka zdobnicza na różnych wyrobach późnej epo-

ki żelaza może wskazywać na sakralizację i większe znaczenie zdobionych w ten sposób artefaktów. Miecze oraz elementy garnituru mieczowego rozpowszechnione wzdłuż wschodnich wybrzeży Morza Bałtyckiego były dekorowane zarówno motywem geometrycznym jak i zwierzęcym. Na marginesie warto dodać, że tradycja niszczenia inwentarza grobowego może sugerować, że broń ta stała się pewnym symbolem, odbiciem idei wojownika, manifestacją przynależności do konkretnej części społeczeństwa i grupową tożsamością odzwierciedloną w kulturze materialnej. Rozprzestrzenienie wschodnio-bałtyckich typów mieczy (zwłaszcza typu kurońskiego) w XI–XIII w. może być rozważane jako ponadetniczny dowód istnienia szczególnych grup społecznych w obrębie całego regionu wschodniobałtyckiego.

Tłumaczenie: Piotr Pudło