

The Balts

Arnīš Rādiņš

THE BALTS IN THE ANCIENT WRITTEN SOURCES

The issue of the Balts in the most ancient written sources is not so simple. Scientists who undertake to research this topic can confirm that. There are various reasons for that, namely, the borders of the writing population reached the Balts comparatively late and the first information about them is rather inaccurate. The ancient and medieval authors can be often characterized by mechanical transfer of already known names to other nations, thereby including the new phenomena in the existing traditional map of the world. Similarly, there are certain interpretation problems present in the process of relating the written sources, archaeological culture, ethnic and language background.

It is considered that the first written information about the ethnical units of the Balts was given by the Greek historian Herodotus (about 480–425 B.C.) in his work “History” (Ἱστορίαι). When referring to Persian invasion in Scythia Herodotus names several inhabitants of the neighbouring countries (TS, 1969, p. 198–206). Their localization in several cases possibly is in the hydronymical zone of the Balts. There is no common view on the ethnical interpretation of these northern neighbours of the Scythians. Most often the Neuri are considered as the Balts. Regarding the significance of the written sources, further on those will be viewed in detail.

In accordance with Herodotus the geographical location of the northern neighbours (who are the subject of interest) of the Scythians is as follows – along with the on-flow of the Buga River above the Scythians (Scythians – ploughmen, Halizones and Kallipids), i.e., to North of the Black Sea the Neuri lived. To the east following Scythians – nomads and Scythians – czars the Melanchlaeni lived. Behind the Dona River there is the land of the Sauromats. Above them there are the Budins. Another reference to the Neuri can be found in the story about the rivers of Scythia. Hero-

dotus has mentioned that next to the border of Scythia and the Neuri land there is a big lake out of which the Dniester River flows out. The lake can be identified with the swamp area at the Upper Pripet River. As Herodotus has repeated the abovementioned description of the location of the northern neighbours of the Scythians, one might believe that it has been appropriate to the existing situation.

Unfortunately it is not known what Herodotus has meant with “higher” and “above” in view of the distance and where the borders of the Scythia ended. Herodotus has indicated clearly that western border of Scythia was the Danube River but the eastern border – Sea of Azov and the Dona River, however, the description of the northern border included only the abovementioned ethnic zones. Supposedly the fact Herodotus has mentioned about Scythia being the same size along the sea and from the sea cannot help much. All in all applying such calculations one can obtain results showing that the borders of the territory of the Scythians are somewhere in the Upper Daugava River and Volga River which is in conflict with the archaeological evidence and indications given by Herodotus on the geographical location of the northern neighbouring tribes. In accordance with the available data the Scythians lived in the steppe region and inhabitants in the forest-steppe region were under their influence. According to this assumption there are two opinions prevailing about the northern border of the Scythians. There is an opinion that the Scythians were located in the steppe region but neighbouring northern tribes in the forest-steppe region (Граков, 1971). The other view is that the Scythians were located in steppe and forest-steppe region but their neighbouring northern tribes – in the forest region (Рибакoв, 1979). According to the information given by Herodotus on the Neuri, Budini, Androphages, Melanchlaeni etc. were the non-Scythian peoples with different language but at the same time they had Scythian lifestyle and traditions.

It should be noted that there are certain contradictions in the process of identifying the archaeological cultures of the northern neighbouring peoples of the Scythians. For example, scientists who defend the forest regions apply Juhnova culture to the Budins, Dnieper–Daugava culture to the Androphages but Milograda culture to the Neuri. There is also other classification present. Scientists who defend forest-steppe region relate the Neuri to the archaeological monuments located in Middle Dnieper River, on the right bank up to the Bug River. The Budins on the other hand possessed archaeological monuments located on the left bank of the Middle Dnieper River up to the Dona River. It must be noted that similarly according to the information given by Herodotus opinion of scientists defending forest-steppe region is preferable. In this regard it is significant to mention that there is an opinion about the location of the centre of the Budins in the City of Gelona located at the hillfort of Belsk on the left bank of the Dnieper River in the Vorskla River basin (Шпамко, 1987).

Continuing the story of the Neuri, it should be noted that they might have been mentioned in the written sources also later (Dini, 2000, p. 51). Roman historian Pliny the Elder (23–79) in his work “Natural History” (*Naturalis historia*) has mentioned the Neuri whose territory began at the Dnieper River. Similarly there is a view that the Nervys referred to in the Roman historian Amiana Marcelina (330–391) work “Things Done” (*Res gestae*) and the Nervans referred to in the Bavarian geographer work “Description of Cities and Lands North of the Danube” (*Descriptio civitatum et regionum ad septentrionalem plagam Danubii*) might be connected with the Neuri. According to this information the Neuri were located in the Upper Dnieper River on the right bank above the Pripet River and swamp areas to west in the Nareva River basin. In some cases the Neuri are linked to “neroms” (нерома) referred to in the transcript (made in the 14th century by Lavrentijs) of ancient Russian chronicle “Tale of Bygone Years” (*Повесть временных лет*) instead of the Latgallians (*Летьгола*). However, the author of the present article does not think this can be justified. By now one does not have any reliable data that would confirm or deny the Neuri belonging to the Balts. But one must admit that the first of the assumptions above-mentioned should be regarded as more convincing.

There is no disagreement about the Aests belonging to the Balts. It is likely that the name is not self-invented. The name “Aests” has been used both in a wide and broad context until the 9th century (Zeids, 1992, p. 7–11; Dini, 2000, p. 55–59). Firstly, it can be found in the work “Germania” (*Germania*) by Roman historian Cornelius Tacit (~55–120). He has written that the Aests tribes lived next to the Baltic Sea, which did not differ from the Suebi in respect to traditions and looks; however, they were closer to the British regarding the language. Chronicler Kasiodor (~480–570) of the Eastern Goths King Teoderich (471–526) has included correspondence with the Aests in the summarized set of letters of his governor. In one letter Teoderich has expressed his gratitude for the amber supplied to Ravenna by their envoys and has invited the Aests to maintain close relations. This letter presents evidence that the Aests have been willing to establish remote trade relations. Moreover, the Gothic historian Jordan (~500–552) in his work “The Origin and Deeds of the Getae/Goths” (*De origine actibusque Getarum*) has referred to the Aests, who according to information available to the historian have lived at the sea eastward of the Vidivaries in the region of Visla River mouth. The Aests were also mentioned by Enhard (~770–840), the bibliographer of the governor of the Frankish state Charles the Great. In his work “Life of Charles the Great” (*Vita Caroli Magni*) Enhard has written that the Slavs, Aests and other peoples lived at the sea. It is also known that at the end of the 9th century seafarer Wulfstan visited the Aests and their territories. He stayed in City of Truso in the region of Visla River mouth, which was a well-known trade centre of the Early Viking Age.

According to information provided by Wulfstan that was published in the history of the world issued by the King of England Alfred the Great (849–899), there were many castles in the territory of the Aests and Aests were aggressive etc. The latest evidence can be related to the Prussians, however, older information might be related also to a larger territory within the borders of the world known to the respective authors.

Regarding the most ancient written sources about the Balts another document should be mentioned. Greek scientist Ptolemy (~90–168) in his maps has marked Baltic peoples Galinds and Sudovians on

the cost of the Baltic Sea eastward from the Veneds (Zeids, 1992, p. 6). There is also an opinion that his “*boruskai, kareotai, salai*” are related to the Prussians, the Couronians and the Selonians; however, this assumption is not well – reasoned. It is highly possible that Jordan has named the Galinds as “Coldas”. Therefore a conclusion can be drawn that the Balts were firstly mentioned in the written sources in the 1st and 2nd century as the Aests, the Galinds and Yotvingians (Sudovians).

ORIGIN AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL CULTURES OF THE BALTS

One must admit that there always has been a problem of linking the data available to linguists and archaeologists. Unfortunately material obtained in the excavations cannot provide information on language used by the representatives of certain archaeological culture. Similarly linguists are not able to date place-names and exactly hydronyms are the ones who have been preserved for the longest. Of course, there are also written sources, however, those as it was mentioned above, provide information on comparatively later periods. As a result it is possible to interpret the data leaving the space for scientist’s “subjective” belief and opportunity to select “the necessary” from the other sphere. It is widely known that ethnical interpretation of certain archaeological cultures has been performed from the point of view of “Baltists”, “Slavists” or “Germanics”. As regards the matter of the history of the Balts, the archaeologists have tried to place certain archaeological cultures in the area recognized as the hydronymic area of the Balts.

According to the traditional view the beginning of the Balts dates back to the second half of the 3rd millenary BC (Sedovs, 1992; Gimbutiene, 1994). At the respective period at the Upper Dniester River the Corded Ware and Battleaxe Culture originated. People were cattle breeders but practiced also agriculture. They were familiar with metal – copper and bronze and their products. Spreading of representatives of the Corded Ware and Battleaxe Culture in the forest regions of Europe from the Volga River to the Rhine River is considered the first phase of Indo-European language entering and it is also the beginning of the

Indo-Europeanization of the inhabitants of the region. This is proved by compatible spread of the hydronymy of the ancient Indo-Europeans. It was mainly peaceful process of long-term and frequentative migration. It is considered that the Balts originated there where they were not assimilated or oppressed by migration waves of other peoples.

The author of the present article claims that the first Real Balts date back to the 1st millenary BC. The author agrees that spread of the Corded Ware and Battleaxe Culture as of 3rd to 2nd millenary BC in the forest region of Eastern and Middle Europe marks the beginning of Indo-Europeanization, however, one cannot claim that any of the groups of the culture is the same as the Real Balts or even earlier phase – the Proto-Balts. Supposedly they should be treated as Ancient Europeans of Indo-Europeans who due to various circumstances obtained new characteristics, including ethnical identity. The less there were external conditions, the longer the initial identity was preserved. According to such interpretation the Proto-Balts represented the Rzucewo Culture and Post East-Baltic Culture; the first more interacting with the second. The Corded Ware and Battleaxe Culture representatives had different impact in each of these cases. Without doubt it was more explicit and emphasized in the Rzucewo Culture. On the basis of those the cultures of the Real Balts originated, namely, barrow burial field culture (Western Balts) and Scratched Ware Culture (Eastern Balts). It is significant to note that the first reliable written sources on the geographical location of ethnical group of the Balts correspond with this hypothesis.

Supposedly during the process of creation of the Scratched Ware Culture additional impulse was received from the ancestors of the Ancient Europeans. The beginning of the process in the Latvian archaeology was firstly noted in the archaeological excavations of Gaigalava Brikuļi hillfort. Clay hearths with edge were excavated there. Sixty of the eighty detected fire usage places have been related to the above-mentioned type (Vasks, 1994, p. 19–22). Previously the local inhabitants did not use such. Usually they fenced the fire place with a stone ring. However, it must be also noted that there were no hearths with stone ring found in Gaigalava Brikuļi. The hearths with clay edge have been excavated also in other areas of the Scratched

Ware Culture. There is no doubt that the respective fire place tradition could be found also in the south. This might indicate that there have been newcomers, although now it is not possible to identify them taking into account this feature. It is possible that they were related to the Sosnica Culture. It must be also mentioned that the newcomers were cattle-breeders.

It is significant to understand that borders of territories inhabited by the Baltic Finns were changing mainly due to climate changes and this provided natural advantages for certain type of economy.

As it is widely known that according to linguistic point of view the Slavic languages are the closest to the Balts, moreover the abovementioned feature is not characteristic of all the area but particularly of the Eastern Balts. There are two basic opinions regarding this (Dini, 2000, p. 155–167): the first is based on the initial community of the Balts and Slavs, the second, however, points at the development of the Slavs on the basis of interaction between periphery of the Eastern Balts and Proto-Slavic groups. Further on a brief insight in the Slavic origin will be given.

The Slavs were for the first time mentioned in the written sources in the 6th century, when the Slavs appear on the banks of the Danube River on the borderland of Eastern Roman (Byzantine) Empire. In accordance with the information provided by the Goth historian Jordan (Юрдан, 1997, с. 67), the big tribe of the Venets was living in a large territory at the flow-out of the Vistula River. They are mainly called “Sclaveni” and “Antes”. The Sclaveni lived to the west from the Dniester River to the Vistula River in the north; the Antes – from the Dniester River to the Dnepr River. The Venets have been mentioned also by the Roman historian Tacit in the 1st century, indicating that he was not sure to whom the Venets could be compared to – Germanic peoples or the Sarmatians, however, as they were building houses, used big shields and represented infantry, it is most likely that they belonged to the Germanic peoples. Ethnonyms “Venets” and “Veneds” have been used continuously regarding various ethnical groups, in this case already known names have been transferred to new peoples, including the new phenomena into the traditional world map. Neither “Venets”, nor “Antes” can be considered a self-invented name of the Slavs. As regards the Slavs their

self-invented name was “Slovenians” that can be related to “Sclaveni”.

The first Slavic culture generally accepted by archaeologists is the Prague – Korchak Culture that had occupied large territory from the Elbe River to the Oder River to the Pripet River and the Dnieper River. It can be certainly linked to the evidence provided by the written sources. However, the question remains – what was there before?

The question would not be revealed sufficiently, if the Great Migration of Peoples would not be mentioned. As of the 1st century borders of the Roman Empire consolidated at the Danube River. This caused new conflicts with the barbarians. It is traditionally considered that the beginning of the Great Migration of Peoples was the conflict of Romans with Goths in the 3rd century.

During the first centuries after the birth of Christ migration of the Goths from the lower reaches of the Vistula River to northern banks of the Black Sea, migration of the Sarmatians and later on the Alani forcing the Scythians out of their territories, activities of the Celts and the Germanic peoples, invasion of the Huns in the end of the 4th century destroying the Cherniakhov Culture and forcing out the Sarmatians and Alani, as well as other events enabled intensive interaction of cultures that was moving in all directions affecting also the forest area of Europe. In 395 Roman Empire divided in two parts – Eastern Roman and Western Roman states. So called barbarians gained new opportunities which led to takeover of the Western Roman state and establishment of their states. These changes affected also Slavs and Balts. Definitely it can be assumed that in the territory between the Dnieper River and Pripet River the Ants could have originated and it can be also considered the beginning of the Slavs. More and more scientists believe the hypothesis claiming that the Prague – Korchak Culture is related to the Kiev Culture of 3rd–5th centuries (Терпиловский, 2004, с. 67–73). The Slavic interpretation of the latter has become widely acknowledged. However, it must be noted that there is no archaeological evidence that there has been any united culture of Balts and Slavs.

The Slavs were actively involved in the Great Migration of Peoples. In 6th–7th century they invaded in the territory of Byzantium and settled in the Balkans.

They were also moving in the direction of the Vistula River to the Baltic Sea etc. At the end of the 8th century spreading of the Slavs was affected by Charles the Great. His army destroyed the Avar Khaganate and invaded the Western part.

The waves of the Great Migration of Peoples certainly reached the Balts. In the first centuries after the birth of Christ the tradition of barrow burial fields with stone ring originated in the middle of the barrow burial field culture (Western Balts) and Scratched Ware Culture (Eastern Balts) and later on in the western part of the Scratched Ware Culture the barrow burial fields appeared. Certainly it was movement from southwest to northwest. It has been proved by the antiquities, including the plastered pottery. There is evidence that under the influence of the Western Balts the Middle Balts originated. The Middle Balts located in the south together with the Latgallians were affected by certain interaction of the Eastern Balts. It is most likely that the representatives of the Barrow Burial Field Culture of the Eastern Lithuania (Lithuanians) are the main descendants of the Scratched Ware Culture.

As regards the Eastern Balts, the issue of the ethnical interpretation of the Kriviches is of great importance. The author of the present article believes that it is more reliable that the tradition of the long barrow burial fields originated in the local environment, i.e., environment of the Baltic Finns, and it cannot be related to the invasion of the Slavs (Аун, 1992). Afterwards this type of burials could have been adopted by the Eastern Balts (Radīš, 1999), as the tradition of the barrow burial fields was familiar. There is no archaeological evidence that would prove the hypothesis on the Slavs – representatives of the long barrow burial field tradition – coming in via the Upper Daugava River and the middle of the Velikaya River and the

Lovate River in the lands in the middle of the Bugas River and Neman River. Archaeological monuments of such kind have not been discovered anywhere else. Ethnonym “Kriviches” is of Baltic origin and most likely contains the name “krievs” – the ethnical unit of the Eastern Balts (Хабургаев, 1979). It seems that they established stable culture of the Eastern Balts.

At the same time it must be noted that as of the 3rd century spreading of the traditions of the Kiev Culture to north (Лопатин, Фурсов, 2007, с. 104–105). As a result of this process in the territory between the Scratched Ware Culture and Dnieper–Daugava Culture monuments of Zaozerye-Uzmen type were created. Further on in the 4th century the last two transformed into Tushemla-Bantserovshchina Culture that existed until the 7th century. The author of the present article claims that the ethnic interpretation of the Slavic feature as a dominating element shall be rejected. The Tushemla-Bantserovshchina Culture certainly included the elements of the descendants of the Eastern Balts (Шмидт, 1999, с. 41–42) and ancient Europeans. The latter certainly played an important role in the Upper Oka and the subsequent Moshchino Culture of 4th to 7th century. It is generally known that Moshchino Culture is related to “coldas” referred to by Jordan (Sedovs, 1992, p. 89). The question whether these Goldi and Galinds of the Western Balts are the same is still open for discussion.

Supposedly the Slavs during the second period of their spreading as of the 7th century in the Upper Dnieper River and farther to north during certain periods of time met the Eastern Balts and descendants of the ancient Europeans who already had Slavic features. Therefore Slavonization processes in the respective territory were promoted.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Dini P. U., 2000. Baltu valodas. Rīga.
 Gimbutiene M., 1994. Balti aizvēsturiskajos laikos. Rīga.
 Radīš A., 1999. 10.–13. gadsimta senkapī latgaļu apdzīvotajā teritorijā un Austrumlatvijas etniskās, sociālās un politiskās vēstures jautājumi. Rīga.
 Sedovs V., 1992. Balti senatnē. Rīga.
 TS, 1969. Teiksmainā senatne. Rīga.
 Vasks A., 1994. Brikuļu nocietinātā apmetne. Rīga.

- Zeids T., 1992. Senākie rakstītie Latvijas vēstures avoti. Rīga.
 Аун М., 1992. Археологические памятники второй половины I-ого тысячелетия н. э. в Юго-Восточной Эстонии. Таллинн.
 Граков Б. Н., 1971. Скифы. Москва.
 Иордан, 1997. О происхождение и деяние гетов. Санкт-Петербург.

Лопатин Н. В., Фурасьев А. Г., 2007. Северные рубежи раннеславянского мира в III–V веках н. э. Москва.

Рибаков Б. А., 1979. Геродотова Скифия. Историко-географический анализ. Москва.

Терлиловский Р. В., 2004. Славяне Поднепровья в первой половине I тысячелетия н. э. Lublin.

Хабургаев Г. А., 1979. Этимология. Повести временных лет. Москва.

Шмидт Е. А., 1999. Племена верновьев Днепра во второй четверти I тыс. н. э. In: *Гісторыя Беларускага Падняпрэя*. Могілёў.

Шрамко Б. А., 1987. Бельское городище скифской эпохи (город Гелон). Киев.

BALTAI

Arnīs Radiņš

Santrauka

I ir II amžiuje rašytiniuose šaltiniuose minimi baltai, tai yra aisčiai, galindai ir jotvingiai (sudūviai). Remiantis tradiciniu požiūriu, baltų archeologinių kultūrų susiformavimo pradžia datuojama III tūkstantmečio pr. Kr. antrąja puse. Šio straipsnio autorius mano, kad tikrieji baltai susiformavo I tūkstantmetyje pr. Kr. Autorius pritaria, kad Rytų ir Vidurio Europos miškų zonoje III–II tūkstantmetyje pr. Kr. paplitusi virvelinės keramikos arba kovos kirvių kultūra žymi indoeuropeizacijos pradžią. Tačiau negalima tvirtinti, kad bet kuri kultūrinė grupė yra tas pats, kas tikrieji baltai ar netgi ankstyvieji protobaltai. Galbūt šios grupės, kurios dėl įvairių priežasčių įgavo naujų bruožų, kartu ir etninį identitetą, turėtų būti laikomos

senaisiais indoeuropiečiais. Kuo mažiau būdavo išorinės įtakos, tuo ilgiau išlikdavo pirminis identitetas. Remiantis šia interpretacija, protobaltus manoma buvus Žucevo kultūros ir post-rytų baltų kultūros. Pirmoji labiau veikė antrąją. Virvelinės keramikos arba kovos kirvių kultūros atstovai turėjo skirtingą įtaką šiems procesams. Be abejonės, tai labiau pasireiškė Žucevo kultūroje. Tuo remiantis, pradinės tikrųjų baltų kultūros yra pilkapių kultūra (vakarų baltai) ir brūkšniuotosios keramikos kultūra (rytų baltai). Svarbu pažymėti, kad pirmieji rašytiniai šaltiniai paminėjo tas geografines vietas, kurios sutampa su šioje hipotezėje išskirtomis etninių baltų grupių gyventomis vietomis.

Iš anglų kalbos vertė *Lijana Remeikaitė*

Įteikta 2011 m. birželio mėn.