

EUGENIJUS JOVAIŠA, *AISČIAI. KILMĖ* (THE AISTIANS: THEIR ORIGIN)

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It is not often that Lithuanian archaeologists undertake active investigations into the development of Prehistoric Baltic culture as a part of Baltic archaeology in the areas of modern foreign states. The recent fundamental study *Aisčiai. Kilmė* (The Aistians: Their Origin) by Eugenijus Jovaiša, beautifully produced by the Lithuanian University of Educational Sciences and the Lithuanian Academy of Sciences, is an exception.

Jovaiša presents the well-grounded idea that 'the development of historical thought, not only in foreign but also in Lithuanian historiography, established the tradition of the Semba and Masurian Lakes as being the boundary of the West Balts; while the lands stretching to the west in the lower reaches of the Vistula and in Pomerania did not, as it were, have anything in common with the Balts.' In presenting the development of West Balt culture in the last centuries of the first millennium BC and in the period of Roman influence, the author of this monograph discusses the relationship between West Balt tribes and Germanic peoples, Goths and Slavs, on the basis of data from archaeological, linguistic and historical sources.

From the early first millennium BC, Baltic culture predominated in East Pomerania and all the former Prussia, and its boundaries almost coincided with the boundaries of the distribution of Balt hydronyms established by linguists. The author discusses the situation in detail, and indicates the period when the West Balts populated these areas. The fact that quite a few Polish archaeologists have made an effort to relate the population of Prehistoric West Balt areas to the Slavs is nothing new. Thus, T. Malinowski (1969; 1975, pp.5-46)¹ discusses the attribution of face-urn culture identified in West Balt territory: he assigns the area of East Pomerania to Wejherowsko-Krotoszyńska culture, in

the northern part of which human remains were buried in urn boxes. Simultaneously, from the Hallstatt C period, barrows were widespread over the same area, and their equipment did not differ from those of West Balt culture. Meanwhile, in the area of Lusatian culture, in the Late Bronze and Early La Tène periods, the custom of burying in barrows disappeared. However, in East Pomerania, just as in the territory of West Balt barrow culture, the tradition survived. The data proved that in the easternmost part of East Pomerania, the impact of Lusatian culture was minimal, even in the middle of the first millennium BC. The change in funeral customs (the transition from primary burial to cremation) was slow, and the latter burial rite came to predominate in Lusatian culture only in the middle period. The rite also became established in West Balt Barrow culture. However, with changes taking place in the rite, the deceased and their unique burial equipment were later buried in barrows, which was not the case in Lusatian culture. This is the essential difference between Lusatian and West Balt Barrow culture, not merely in the area on the right bank of the Vistula, but also on the left bank, covering the eastern part of Pomerania.

To discuss the development of West Balt culture in the first millennium BC from a broader perspective, we have to note that the custom of cremation spread from the Central European urnfield area around the eighth century BC, and survived until the first century BC, when primary burial started gradually to prevail. How does, for example, Lusatian or West Balt Barrow culture differ from other cultures? First of all, by the fact that in the newly forming West Balt area, the deceased were first cremated, and then buried in barrows, while in Lusatian culture the dead were buried in flat burial grounds. Therefore, the identification by Polish archaeologists of individual groups of Lusatian culture in the former East Prussia, where barrows were widespread, is unacceptable, both from the point of view of the material culture and of burial rites. There is

¹ MALINOWSKI, T., 1969. Obrządek pogrzebowy ludności kultury pomorskiej, Wrocław-Warszawa-Kraków, Problem pogranicza prasłowiańsko-prailiryskiego. *Slavica Antiqua*, 1975, 25, 5-46.

no doubt that Lusatian culture had an impact on West Balt Barrow culture, and contacts with southern and Central Europe were maintained through it. However, the exclusion of some Lusatian culture groups, such as Warmian-Masurian and partly Chelmin, and the failure later, in the Hallstatt D and La Tène periods, to assign them to West Balt Barrow culture, means the refusal of Polish archaeologists to see essential newly forming cultural traits typical of the West Balts that existed in East Prussia in the Late Bronze and Pre-Roman Period. These traits of Baltic culture are evident in the distribution not only of burial mounds with central structures built of stones and stone-boxes-houses, but also of the prevailing pear-shaped urns, Nortican-type battle-axes, flanged East Baltic-type axes, pins with a spiral head, and a double spiral plate with a loop in the central part. Individual areas of West Balt Barrow culture differed in the uneven distribution of face-urns. Face-urns were most widespread in Pomeranian culture, much less in the Sambian-Natangian area, and none at all were found on the Lithuanian and Latvian coasts, where they were substituted by complex central structures or stone boxes with cremated burials, which, in terms of spiritual culture, link them to the house-shaped urns from the area of Pomeranian culture.

In the discussion of the Roman Period (or the Roman Iron Age), the author of the monograph indicates that Wielbark culture, which formed in the linguistic area of the Balts, has never been investigated in the common context of the development of West Balt cultures. The author divides the area of West Balt culture in the Roman Period into three parts: northern (people of Barrow culture), central (people of flat burial grounds of west and Central Lithuania and the lower reaches of the Nemunas), and southern (Wielbark, Semba-Natanga and Galindian (Bogaczewo and Sudovian-Yotvingian people)). The author's conclusions are based on a summarising view of the development of Wielbark culture as an integral part of the rest of the West Balts, characterised by traits of development common to that part of Balt culture. As is argued by the author, the end of the Pre-Roman Period was the start of Aistian expansion: migration in all areas of West Balt barrow culture. During it, the Aistians moved in a northeast direction, towards the rivers Daugava and Gauja, and in an eastern direction, towards the Brushed pottery culture area, thus distributing the new culture from the mouth and the lower reaches of the Vistula all over Pomerania. To quote the author, 'this summarising glance suggests a different view of the development of Wielbark culture, and it is necessary to emphasise that the differences between Wielbark culture and the other Aistians should be explained by the differences in the areas emerging in the Early Iron Age. In the second

half of the Early Iron Age, in all areas, the burial rites started to change: non-cremated burials appeared, and a gradual transition from the tradition of barrows to flat burials took place. The latter form has been presented as exclusive to Wielbark culture; however, the rest of the West Balt world went through the same changes ...' The author is rather persuasive when he suggests the spread of the West Balts from the mouth of the Vistula, the Sambian Peninsula, and the Lithuanian and Latvian coasts in all directions in the period from 10 to 40 AD. One of the directions was the eastern part of Pomerania, which acquired the form of Wielbark culture, and, together with the Balts of the Masurian Lakes, formed the southern area of the West Balts. The author argues that the southern area of West Balts was characterised by the same traits of migration and expansion as the West Balts who lived further to the north. The formation process of the culture of the southern West Balts was abrupt. To quote the author, as early as the period 10 to 70 AD, they occupied all the Pomeranian area, and before 220 AD, Wielbark culture people descended to the River Vltava in the south, crossed over to the right bank of the Vistula, and reached Pripyat. In the years 220 to 260, the southern West Balts were ousted from Pomerania by a Germanic Dębczyno group, and consequently were forced to migrate southwards: from the upper reaches of the River Bug in Pripyat towards its upper reaches, coming to the confluence of the rivers San and Vistula and the River Styrius. On the left bank of the River Vistula, the West Balts were left the lands west of Gdansk, and south as far as the bend in the Vistula, where it turns southeastwards. Pressure from the Germanic Dębczyno group had an impact on the expansion of Wielbark culture towards the western part of Brushed Pottery culture, which turned into a new stimulus for the formation of Sudovian-Yotvingian cultures. In the opinion of the author of the monograph, this expansion by the Southwest Balts survived until the end of the Old Iron Age. The processes of the expansion of Wielbark culture, as they are presented by the author, make the active participation of the West Balts in the Great Migration understandable and possible, as is also witnessed by the distribution of Balt brooches (a crossbow with a bent foot, a crossbow decorated with ringlets, and enamelled) in the area of Chernyakhov culture after 220. The author argues that the development of Wielbark culture is not exclusive: it forms part of the common process of the development of the West Balts.

Another important observation by Jovaiša is the fact that the Balts of Semba and the Lithuanian coast had a great impact on the formation of the area of flat burial grounds typical of western and central Lithuania and the lower reaches of the River Nemunas. In his opin-

ion, the migration of northern West Balts from the area of West Balt Barrow culture on the Lithuanian and Latvian coastlands affected the formation of a Northwest Baltic branch, a burial mound culture, which stretched from the River Gauja in the north and the middle reaches of the rivers Daugava and Šventoji in the east.

Substantial attention in Jovaiša's monograph is paid to the oldest relations between the Balts and Germanic peoples, as well as the Balts and the Slavs. In his analysis of them, the author pays special attention to issues raised by both Lithuanian and foreign archaeologists, and relating to the overestimation of the impact of neighbouring (Germanic and Slavic) cultures on the development of West Balt culture, and trends in the search for polyethnic societies in the depths of Balt culture. The author argues that the small part of imported artefacts, or artefacts with traits of foreign culture, is frequently overestimated and given more prominence than numerous items of undoubtedly local material culture, that is, typical of the West Balts. The search for polyethnicity, as indicated by the author of the monograph, in the history of the West Balts is largely based on the same overestimation of imported artefacts or a biased interpretation of artefacts featuring traits of foreign cultures.

In Jovaiša's opinion, there is an attempt to oust archaeology from the study of history, by leaving it only the function of finding out the techniques of crafts, trades, arts and other areas of Prehistoric life (see H. Van den Boom 2005).² However, the mission of archaeology is 'to investigate the part of the history of a specific ethnic community that cannot be reached by data from historical sources'. We cannot ignore the conclusion of the author in his analysis of the development of artefact manufacturing techniques. The subtleties of West Balt material culture and its technical achievements have been especially underestimated in the work of R. Banytė-Rowell (see R. Banytė-Rowell 2007).³ The author provides a justified criticism of the claims of 'technical disability' of the Balts made by Banytė-Rowell.

According to Jovaiša, in his analysis of the search for polyethnicity in the Roman Period, the Germanic element is most frequently referred to. Lately, the trend has manifested itself in the Germanisation of Sambian-Natangian culture in works by V. Kulakov (see Кулаков 2005⁴). We have to admit that not a single

possibility of polyethnicity in the Baltic lands and on the periphery of the Baltic world from among all those suggested has been confirmed in archaeological material. Therefore, the question arises whether the overestimation of one thing or phenomenon does not result in the overestimation of another: in other words, 'due to the isolation of foreign artefacts from the environment of Balt-manufactured items, and the overestimation of those received due to mutual relations, the latter have turned into an inappropriate basis for the solution of questions of ethnic history.'

On the issue of hydronyms, the author argues that Baltic hydronyms can in no way appear in areas not inhabited by Balts. Special attention in the monograph is paid to the distribution of Baltic hydronyms in the area of East Pomerania. To justify the appearance of Baltic hydronyms in these areas, Jovaiša provides archaeological data starting from the first millennium BC, and puts a special emphasis on the development of face-urn culture and its existence in the area at a time when Germanic influence had not yet reached East Pomerania. There were no Slavic tribes in this area either. According to the author, who refers to Jordanes' *The Origins and the Deeds of the Goths*, written in the second half of the sixth century, and research by the linguists J. Udolph⁵ and J. Otrębski, in the area of East Pomerania, neither in the Prehistoric period nor until the seventh or eighth century AD, did the West Balts have contact with Slavs. Formerly, contacts between Slavs and Germanic tribes were observed, but not with Balts, which failed to witness the existence of a common Baltic-Slavic proto-language, as hydronyms in branches of the two languages were too different. Therefore, the lands populated by Slavs (Sclaveni), as is indicated by Jordanes, bordering on the upper reaches of the Vistula in the west, coincided with the distribution of the earliest finds of Prague culture in Lesser Poland (in Latin *Po-lonia Minor*). The author argues that the appearance of Slavs in the lands of the Vistula basin should be dated to as late as the second half of the sixth century; then they reached the Oder and moved further west, as far as the Elbe in the seventh, and possibly the early eighth century.

Jovaiša pays special attention to the history of the northern Goths, as he finds it impossible to account for, either by archaeological facts or language or written records. On the basis of archaeology, the author indicates that the early development of Wielbark culture (the culture assigned to the Goths) thrived in the area of Baltic hydronyms and Balt archaeological cultures, that is, in Pomerania, which from the seventh to the

arkheologii. Moscow, 48-64.

⁵ UDOLPH, J., 1979. *Studien zu slawischen Gewässernamen und Gewässerbezeichnung*. Heidelberg, 640.

² VAN DEN BOOM, H., 2005. Do kwestii etniczności kultury pomorskiej. In: *Aktualne problemy kultury pomorskiej*. Gdańsk.

³ BANYTĖ-ROWELL, R., 2007. Romėnų įtakos laikai ir baltų kultūrų klestėjimo laikotarpis. In: G. ZABIELA, ed. *Lietuvos istorija. Geležies amžius*, vol. II. Vilnius, 27-172.

⁴ KULAKOV, V., 2005. "Kniazheskie" zakhroneniia v Baltii faz B₁-C₁. In: *Kratkie soobshcheniia instituta*

sixth century BC should be considered a zone of West Balt influence: it was in that zone that a branch of West Balt Barrow culture, that is, face-urn culture, developed. That was the westernmost Baltic area, and its communities were the closest to the Germanic tribes. Face-urn culture, according to the author, was identical to other West Balt burial mound cultures: Sambian-Natangian, West Masurian, Curonian (west Lithuania and west Latvia), and Sudovian (Yotvingian) in eastern Masuria. In the opinion of the author of the monograph, as early as the end of the Pre-Roman Period, a distinct process of change took place there, characterised by the development of the use of iron in households and a change in burial rites: the transition from burial mounds to flat burials, and from cremation to primary burial. The author believes that the changes took place not merely in Wielbark culture, but also in western Lithuania, and in the distribution of new cultures in the central part of the West Balt area. The custom of burying deceased persons in barrows did not disappear: it continued in the new cultures (burial mound culture in the north), or in the coexistence of both (Wielbark and Sambian-Natangian cultures, and the Lithuanian Trans-Nemunas culture, which has been regarded lately as a zone of influence of Galindian [Bogaczewo] culture). Wielbark culture is also related to other communities of West Balt culture by the distribution of brooches: profiled, ladder, enamelled, crossbow with a bent foot, and crossbow decorated with ringlets. The author defines the Vistula as the principal amber route through the Baltic area: amber traders would reach the principal Roman amber trading place at Carnuntum via the middle and upper reaches of the Vistula, assisted by the Lugii, who controlled the area. He describes in detail the spatial orientation of the dead of the communities of that time, which was not an exclusive trait of Wielbark culture: the tradition of the spatial orientation of the dead and the worship of celestial deities by orienting the dead towards celestial bodies was also a characteristic of other West Balt cultures. With respect to the Goths, a very important issue emphasised by the author is the impossibility of proving the fact, generally circulated in archaeology, of the alleged migration of north Germanic tribes from southern Scandinavia or the island of Gotland to the lower reaches of the Vistula. The author argues that the archaeology of southern Scandinavia in the first and second centuries AD does not witness a situation that would enable significant migration to other lands. On the contrary, the cultural diffusion at the time was directed from the mainland to the islands, and in the cultural relations between Gotland and the mainland, in the first, second and third centuries, we can identify the predominance of the mainland culture, or even cultural communion,

as is also indicated by V. Žulkus (1995⁶). Moreover, the Balt languages feature few Gothic loanwords which might have come from the voyages of members of the West Balt military elite in the period of military aristocracy, witnessed by archaeological material from the late fifth and sixth centuries, towards the Black Sea as far as Constantinople and the Danube basin, where they must have met Goths and Slavs. These statements by Jovaiša are rather important to archaeologists, both in Lithuania and abroad, who are interested in issues of the origins and migration of the Goths.

Jovaiša's monograph *Aisčiai. Kilmė* is an original and very valuable study, and regrettably the first to deal with the development of West Balt culture in the Pre-Roman and Roman periods since the review papers by M. Gimbutienė. The study stands out by its abundance of references to archaeological material and historical sources from the period analysed, as well as the use of the chronology of the formation of language (historical grammar in a broad sense), which became the leitmotif of the monograph.

I would argue that the most significant contributions by Eugenijus Jovaiša to investigations into West Balt culture are the resolution of the issue of the inclusion of Wielbark culture in the area of West Balt culture, the identification of the impact of West Balt culture on the development of central and eastern Baltic communities, the criticism of the idea of polyethnicity imposed on the West Balts by Lithuanian and foreign archaeologists through the development of a rather challenging discussion with respect to the origin of the northern Goths, the definition of the cultural situation of the West Balts in the Pre-Roman and Roman periods, and the compatibility of Lithuanian archaeological research material with similar material from north and northwest Poland, which witnesses the rather complex development of West Balt culture from the Bronze Age to the Roman Period, as well as the impact of Germanic and Slavic communities on them.

This review of Eugenijus Jovaiša's monograph *Aisčiai. Kilmė* should finish with his own words, that the author's conclusions 'cannot be fully proved'. However, 'all efforts to "Germanise" Semba, the lower reaches of the Nemunas, or central Lithuania' stem from the inability to see the inconsistencies arising relating to the prevailing search for the Gothic 'shade', or to have a different way of looking at the ethnic history of the east Baltic region.

⁶ ŽULKUS, V. Vakarų baltai gotų-gepidų migracijoje. In: N. VĖLIUS, ed. *Lietuvinių kraštas*. Kaunas, 74-107.