PROVENANCE STUDY OF LATE 16TH CENTURY BARRELS FOUND IN KLAIPĖDA

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Abstract

The article examines trading conditions in medieval Klaipėda (Memel) and reports the results of the latest dendrochronological dating of oak found in the Old Town.

Key words: dendroprovenancing, dendrochronology, oak chronology, Hanseatic League, timber trade, urban archaeology, barrels, Baltic Sea region.

Dendroprovenancing: new opportunities for archaeological research

The use of the dendrochronological method in archaeology has advanced significantly over the last few decades. This method of timber dating has disclosed quite a few facts about historical events never mentioned in written records, it has shed light on the daily routines of the remote past, and uncovered processes never before heard of in the archaeology of settlements and towns.

From the standpoint of the present, it is easy to understand the significance to West European dendrochronologists of identifying and dating Baltic timber exported via Gdansk and other Baltic ports. Due to the timber trade, a huge amount of wood of Baltic origin spread all over Western Europe between the 14th and 17th centuries, and Western dendrochronologists find it difficult to date the wood because of the shortage of Baltic region oak chronologies. In turn, due to the international trade, certain amounts of timber of “exotic” provenance (coming, for example, from Norway, the Netherlands, England or France) had to settle in the archaeological context of the towns of the Baltic region. Local dendrochronologists are faced with the task of identifying, dating and establishing the provenance of the timber.

The potential of dendrochronological dating has not been fully exploited, despite the fact that one of the initial targets of dendrochronological dating was merely the designing of chronologies suitable for the precise dating of construction or archaeological wood that no thorough archaeological research could do without.

It would currently be correct to say that the dendrochronological method, doomed to function merely as an auxiliary branch of archaeology, has outgrown itself. In the history of dendrochronology, dendrolabs appeared in Denmark, Germany, England and Sweden throughout the Sixties and Seventies of the 20th century, with the aim of accumulating samples of wood, dating them, and designing chronologies of wood to cover the period from the Stone Age to the present.

We can probably now talk about the current maturity of the method, as a wide circle of researchers occupied in the field have mastered the principles of establishing the date of woodcutting and of interpreting the results obtained. Establishing dates became a routine and obvious goal of dendrochronology. However, due to personal contacts and the exchange of data, new problems surfaced in dendrochronological research. Next to the question when the tree was cut (with the aim of designing chronologies of softwood and hardwood, covering the period from the present to prehistoric times, and precise dating methods), new ones arose: where and when the tree was cut. Next to the chronology, the precise time and place of cutting the tree became of interest (the specific wood, the terrain, and the region, such as northern France or Finland). This new branch of dendrochronology became known as “dendroprovenancing” (Bonde et al 1995: 202).

A short review of Klaipėda’s trade in the late medieval period

After the foundation of Klaipėda (Memel) in 1252, it would periodically attract the glow of the Hanseatic towns. As early as the spring of 1261, the vice-master of Livonia, in his letter to Lübeck merchants, informed them about the conditions for colonists to settle in Klaipėda and asked them to come before winter started (Žukas 2005: 71). The newborn city was even awarded Lübeck trading rights; however, it lost them in the late 15th century due to developments unfavourable to the city.
Because of this historical change in its history, Klaipėda’s name appeared in Hanseatic records less and less frequently. That was only natural: Hanseatic towns, such as Danzig (currently Gdansk), Königsberg (currently Kaliningrad), Riga, and a number of other towns which had at least trading stations of Hanseatic merchants, overshadowed Klaipėda as a member of trade relationships. Klaipėda was reluctantly excluded from the current network of dendroprovenancing research because, as early as the 14th century, the River Prieglius was linked with the Curonian Lagoon by a canal, and from that time on, Gdansk was the chief commercial port of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania (Wazny 1992: 331). A stereotype was formed by which, in the 15th to the 17th centuries, in terms of the level of trade, Klaipėda was a small and insignificant coastal town, but not a trading partner or even a supplier of raw materials. However, it was not exclusively exports from the Grand Duchy of Lithuania that were served by the Prieglius–Curonian Lagoon canal: goods travelled by this route from Klaipėda to Königsberg and vice versa all year round (in winter, the overland route down the Curonian Spit was used) (Žulkus 2005: 74).

The minor importance of the port of Klaipėda cannot be disputed; however, it would be incorrect to state that from 1252, the year when the town was founded, no effort was made to exploit the harbour and the huge commercial potential of the River Nemunas and the western region of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania.

There was at least one good reason preventing boats from by-passing Klaipėda, and that was its favourable location: from the Aistmares Strait to the entrance of the Curonian Lagoon next to Klaipėda, for a stretch of 150 kilometres, and north of Klaipėda to Liepaja, for around 75 kilometres, there was not a single safe haven or a safe anchorage for boats during a storm (Žulkus 2002: 102).

In historical records, the activities of brokers (in German Lieger) in Klaipėda in the early 16th century have not been sufficiently covered. Brokers were part of the Order’s trade network managed by the Order’s officials residing in Marienburg and Königsberg (Žulkus 2002: 102). These brokers, although they did not have the rights of town citizens, started buying up local goods in Žemaitija, the west of Lithuania, and shipping them to different European ports. As early as the second half of the 16th century, boats sent by them would sail to Lübeck, the Netherlands, Holland, England and Scotland, while the population of Klaipėda had direct trading relationships almost exclusively with Danzig (Zembrickis 2002: 82–83).

Unfortunately, data on the volume of timber leaving the Klaipėda area does not seem to exist; however, the fact of the existence of timber exports is witnessed by a document from 1468, with reference to a shipment of fish and timber being forfeited in Lübeck and sold (Willoweit 1969, cited in: Žulkus 2002:111).

It is highly probable that the major boom in timber exports from Klaipėda coincided with the beginning of the shipbuilding industry there. For dendrochronology, this is an important fact, as it narrows the area of provenance of some of the timber to the city’s environs. The first ship was built in Klaipėda in 1517 (Žulkus 2002: 107). This date symbolises a special stage in its development as a maritime city and a centre for maritime trade. Ensuing events in the development of the town testify to its economic growth.

In the early 16th century, the town settled in a new location, a planned structure of streets formed, and craftsmen’s guilds appeared in the late 16th century. Slowly but surely, the commercial and economic potential of the town was gaining strength. The fact of a new and dangerous trading competitor becoming established on the eastern Baltic is witnessed by Königsberg merchants’ complaints and protests against the trade and shipping in Klaipėda (Žulkus 2005: 83).

Dendrochronological analysis of barrel heads found in the Old Town of Klaipėda

A rather interesting trading situation in Klaipėda in the middle of the 16th century was disclosed in the analysis of construction timber and barrel remains on the site of number 3 Žvejų Street, in the Old Town (Fig. 1). The main point of interest is the possibility of establishing trading contacts in the 16th century with the help of dendroprovenancing, and producing tangible proof via timber analysis, and not merely on the basis of historical records or imported articles found in the process of archaeological excavations.

In 2005, exploratory archaeological excavations on the site of number 3 Žvejų Street took place under the supervision of R. Jarockis. The place presented special interest, as in a city map/drawing of 1670, there was a building with the inscription “WAGE” next to it. The site was merely 20 metres away from the 16th-century course of the River Danė that served as a port at that time. Archaeological articles found on the site were scarce and not very informative. Therefore, dendrochronological examination became a basic part of the whole project that contributed to a more precise reconstruction of the development of that particular part of the Old Town.
Pine (Pinus sylvestris) and oak (Quercus robur) were examined. The present article shall focus exclusively on oak.

Three pieces of oak were taken for examination from the construction of the building.

- **Key code Zvej3 S3**: 148 tree rings. The date of the last ring is 1544. The later wood had four rings. The estimated date is c.1544.

- **Key code Zvej3 S2**: 153 tree rings. The date of the last ring is 1521. The later wood has not survived. The estimated date is c.1535 or later.

- **Key code Zvej3**: 146 tree rings. The date of the last ring is 1519. The later wood has not survived. The estimated date is c.1533 or later.

The general scale obtained embraced a period of 154 years, from 1373 to 1526.

**Table 1. Number 3 Žvejų Street, Klaipėda: coefficients of individual curve correlation**

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<td>Zvej3 S3</td>
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<td>Zvej3 S3</td>
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* Transformation Baillie/Pilcher
** Transformation Holstein

It should be noted that timber samples from the site excavated demonstrated excellent overlapping with one another (Table 1), and also with the mean value curves of the archaeological/construction timber in Klaipėda Old Town and Baltic 1 (the results of synchronisation are presented in Table 2).

The correlation coefficient between Klaipėda (Memel) archaeological architectural oak wood chronology and the samples from the site at number 3 Žvejų Street is sufficiently high (TBp: 4.84–8.3). There is no doubt that the timber used for construction on that site is of local provenance. This fact is not contradicted by historical data or the charter of 1475, by which the Lübeck trading rights in Klaipėda were substituted for Kulm Rights; the inhabitants of Klaipėda were allowed to cut wood for construction and shipbuilding, as well as to build ships; however, they were not allowed to sell them (Žulkus 2002: 107).

The dated oak samples from the archaeological site at number 3 Žvejų Street were included in the Klaipėda (Memel) oak wood scale presented in Table 4.

A different dendrochronological context came up when parts of barrels found on the site were examined. Five pieces of oak barrel heads were taken for examination:
Key Code Stat 1: 293 tree rings. The date of the last ring is 1580. The later wood had nine rings. The final estimated date is c. 1585.

Key Code Stat 2: 151 tree rings. The date of the last ring is 1547. The later wood has not survived. The final estimated date is c. 1579 or later.

Key Code Stat 3: 136 tree rings. The date of the last ring is 1563. The later wood has not survived. The final estimated date is c. 1579 or later.

Key Code Stat 4: 114 tree rings. The date of the last ring is 1564. The later wood has not survived. The final estimated date is c. 1578 or later.

Key Code Stat 5: 68 tree rings. The date of the last ring is 1539. The later wood has not survived. The final estimated date is c. 1553 or later.

The primary results of synchronisation prove that the oak used for the barrels does not come from the same
Table 5. Individual tree ring series of barrel heads from Klaipėda (number 3 Žveju St.)

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Notes: The numbers in the table represent tree ring measurements in millimeters.
area, although there is no doubt that the samples are of the same age. Klaipėda (Memel) oak wood chronology applies to merely two cases: Stat 1 and 4, that present local, or at least Baltic, provenance. The rest of the wood clearly came from another region. The results obtained are not final. The dendrochronological dates established are not reliably validated by the statistical T values (Table 3). Great attention was paid to the visual similarity, as well as to the existence of a not very significant, but recurring, signal on the chronologies of Klaipėda, Baltic 1 and Baltic 2 (Hillam, Tyers 1995: 402-403), eastern Pomerania (see Wazny) and Hamburg (see Eckstein).

The material presented for examination – parts of barrel heads – do not seem to belong to one and the same barrel. Probably the site examined (number 3 Žvejų Street, Klaipėda) was a place where no longer used barrels were discarded. Again, we have to remember that the plot was close to the presumed cargo handling area and the town scales essential for trading activity.

It needs to be added that the synchronisation results among individual curves was very low, except for Stat 3 and Stat 4 (TBP-5.50, THO-3.79). The correlation of Stat 2 was negative.

The correlation of Stat 1 implies wood coming from Klaipėda’s environs. A high coefficient of correlation with Klaipėda construction wood and Vilnius Lower Castle was observed (Pukienė 2002:106): TBP-2.68, THO-3.31, as well as a high coefficient of similarity (GL 60.7). Ultimately, the Baltic 1 scale adds to the probability of the said supposition.

In accordance with the synchronisation data, Barrel 4 represented a typical sample of Baltic region wood. The correlation with Baltic region chronologies was excellent, while the negative result in the case of the Plate liai scale implied the provenance of the wood being the northern part of the former Prussia, from Klaipėda to Gdansk. The position of Stat 3 was essentially validated by its relationship with the curve of Stat 4. The scales overlapped with a rather high coefficient (TBP-5.50, THO-3.79); however, in the case of other scales, it was only the Klaipėda scale that indicated a reliability of correlation. Evidently, the sample had to be reexamined with respect to other master chronologies.

The most complicated situation occurred in the case of samples Stat 2 and Stat 5. The scales available at the moment of examination did not produce a reliable signal on the accessible scales. Baltic 1 and Baltic 2 scales allow us to presume that the material examined was oak wood from the Baltic region; however, the scales of eastern Pomerania and Klaipėda suggest a provenance of regions adjacent to the Baltic Sea area. One of the reasons to believe that the barrels came from places far beyond the boundaries of the Baltic Sea region is the following: Klaipėda was visited by boats coming from Holland, France, Sweden (Gotland), Norway, Stralsund, Danzig, Lübeck, Kolberg, Königsberg, ports of the River Śventoji, and from Curonia (Żulkus 2002: 106). Herring from Norway would arrive at Klaipėda in barrels; beer, wine, mead and pipes were transported in barrels, too. Salt was brought from Baye (France), from Flanders (Żulkus 2002: 111), and from Luneburg via Lübeck.

The facts presented suggest that the barrel dating results have to be reexamined by dendrochronologists of Western Europe, by comparing the curves of the barrels with the 16th-century oak wood chronologies of England, Norway, Holland and France.

Conclusions

In accordance with the dendrochronological analysis of construction wood found on the site at number 3 Žvejų Street in Klaipėda, we can state that construction work first started there around 1560 (the estimated date of the latest sample is c. 1554). The dating of barrel heads, given the dates established, would be c. 1553 or later, c. 1561 or later, c. 1579 or later, c. 1578 or later, and c. 1585. A lath survived in only one, the last sample (c. 1585). It is currently difficult to establish how long the wood had been stored and dried before the barrels were produced. There is also no answer to the question as to the period of time that the barrels served as containers for goods, or whether that was their secondary use. On the basis of the latest established data, the barrels most likely appeared in the archaeological context of the Old Town in the period between c. 1560 (the first construction work in the area) and 1590 (the latest ring in the wood of 1585).

Ultimately, the issue whether this dating of barrel parts is correct, given the low statistical T value, remains open. It is only possible to confirm or deny the dating results by comparing the established figures with other

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West European chronologies (at the time the present article was being written, they were not accessible). For this reason, a series of annual growth found in the individual barrel samples (Table 5), as well as a chronology of Klaipėda archaeological oak wood (Table 4), is published with the article.

References


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Received: 2006

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XVI A. ANTROSIOS PUSĖS STATINIŲ, RASTŲ KLAIPĖDOS SENAMIESTYE, KILMĖS TYRIMAS

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Santrauka

Dendrochronologijos taikymo archeologijoje plėtra pastaraisiais dešimtmeciais yra ženkliniai pažengusia į priekį. Šis medienos datavimo metodas papildė nežinoma žemės ūkiniuose nutylytų praties fakty, nušvietę kasdienybę ir padėjo išsirti daugelią archeologijos mokslo nežinomų gyvenvietėse bei miestuose vykusių procesų.

Suklaidės medienos prekybai XIV–XVII a., po Vakarų Europą pasiklojo nežinomas kiekis Baltijos kilmės medienos, kurios datavimą Vakarų Europos dendrochronologams sunkina Baltijos regiono ąžuolo chronologijų nepakankamumas. Savo ruožtu nemaža kitų regionų kilmės medienos (pvz., iš Norvegijos, Anglijos, Prancūzijos) turėjo nusėsti į Baltijos regiono miestų archeologinių kontekstą. Šiuo atžvilgiu ne ką mažiau svarbesnį uždavinį Vietos dendrochronologams tampia tokios medienos identifikacija, datavimas bei kilmės nustatymas.

Gana idomi XVI a. vidurio Klaipėdos miesto prekybos situation atskleidė analizuojant 2005 m. vykdytų žvalgomųjų archeologinių tyrimų metu Žvejų g. 3 (Klaipėda) sklype paimtas ąžuolo medienos nuojovas (konstrukcinė architektūrinė mediena bei statinių liekanos). Domimo klausimas, ar galima dendrochronologiskai atskleisti XVI a. prekybos kontaktus ir gauti apie aiškių apibrėžimus per medienos tyrimus, neapspindi ir analizuojant vien istorinių šaltinius ar importuotus dirbiniai, rastais archeologinių tyrimų metu.

Remiantis Žvejų g. 3 skylyje aptiktos konstrukcinių medienos dendrochronologinės datavimos galima teigti, kad pirminis atstymas šioje senamiesčio dalyje susiformavo apie 1553 m. ir vėliau, apie 1561 m. ar vėliau, apie 1577 m. m. vėliau, apie 1585 m. Tik viename vėliau apie 1578 m. ar vėliau, apie 1585 m. Tik viename vėliau apie 1590 m. apie 1590 m. (vėliausia statinės rievė 1585 m.).

Pirminiai sinchronizacijos rezultatai parodė, kad statinių gamyba naudota mediena nėra iš to paties arealo, nors jų vienalaikiškumas neabejotinas. Klaipėdos ąžuolo medienos chronologija tik dviem atvejais tikėtina tiko medienai datuoti. Tuo tarpu kita dalis medienos yra aškėkė išiko meno ir regiono kilmės. Statinių datavimas, atsižvelgiant į gautas datos, būtų: apie 1553 m. ar vėliau, apie 1561 m. ar vėliau, apie 1577 m. ar vėliau, apie 1585 m. Tik viename vėliau apie 1590 m. (vėliausia statinės rievė 1585 m.). Labai sunku pasakyti, ypač tokių medienos viršūnėje buvo išlikusi balana (apie 1585 m.).

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Labai sunkių atakų prasidėjo, kiek laiko mediena buvo sandėliuojama, džiūvinama iki gaminant statines. Tuo labiau nežinoma, kiek metų statinės buvo naudojamos kaip prekių tara, ar jos naudotos antra kartą. Remiantis kol kas turime vėliausia data, tikėtina, kad statinės iš senamiesčio archeologinį kontekstą pateko intervale nuo maždaug 1540 metų (pirminis atstymas) į maždaug 1590 metų (vėliausia statinės rievė 1585 m.).

Galiausiai klausimas, ar tokios dabar pateiktos statinių dalii datavimui datuojama dar teisingos, atsižvelgiant į gana žemą statistinį rodiklį, lieka atviras. Datavimo rezultatai patvirtinimas ar panaikinimas vien tiek net nežinoma, tai augimo pozicijai palyginus su kitomis Vakarų Europos ąžuolo chronologimis (straipsnio rašymo metu jos nebuvo prieinamos). Dėl šios priežasties įrašiusiai į publikuojamos statinių lentučių dendrochronologinės skalės bei Klaipėdos archeologinio ąžuolo medienos skale.