

## REVIEWS

### THE LIVS – NEIGHBOURS OF THE NORTHERN BALTS.

Notes on the margin of Roberts  
Spirģis's monograph

*Bruņrupuču saktas ar krūšu  
važiņrotām un lībiešu kultūras  
attīstība Daugavas lejtecē 10.–13.  
gadsimtā*, Rīga 2008. – 511 pp.,  
206 illustrations



In Roberts Spirģis's monograph *Bruņrupuču saktas ar krūšu važiņrotām un lībiešu kultūras attīstība Daugavas lejtecē 10. – 13. gadsimtā* (*Tortoise Brooches with Pectoral Chain Ornaments and the Development of Liv Culture in the Lower Daugava Area in the 10th–13th centuries*), the author defines the chosen subject and chronological boundaries of the work in minute detail. The discussed monograph is an impressive 511 page text (consisting of an introduction, 9 chapters with subsections, and conclusions) with 206 graphic illustrations and coloured photographs, 40 tables, diagrams and a thorough bibliography, pp. 445-470 (Fig. 1).

That the book is attractive is an uncommon thing to say about a scientific monograph. But for its thoroughly thought over layout, R. Spirģis's monograph about the Daugava's Livs' culture in the 10th-13th centuries is namely an attractive book, whose well-considered text and abundant visual material does not make it particularly difficult for the foreign language speaker who reads this Latvian text. Moreover, in the more difficult parts of the Latvian text, the reader is aided by the extensive summary in English. The summary was splendidly translated by Valdis Bērziņš – the “English voice” of Latvian archaeologists in recent years, who also contributed to the success of this large, coherent work.

From the very Early Roman Period, East Baltic women paid especially much attention to the elaborate pectoral sets; both Baltic and Baltic Finno-Ugric women did so. It is as if it was never a secret that in Viking times and in the Early Middle Ages, Livian womens' pectoral ornaments were impressive for their multi-components – for their tortoise brooches, to which small chain clasps, rows of small chains, or openwork dividers would be fastened, and then various small household accesso-

ries hung from the chains – from knives with bronze sheaths to needle-cases and ear-picks, as wells as a great number of amulets. But never was this magnificent, multi-component ornament so scrupulously analysed and linked to all of the Daugava Livs' material culture development in the way done by the author of this thorough monograph, R. Spirģis.

Especially careful attention in R. Spirģis's monograph is paid to typology, which is, in fact, the axis of this work, around which turn all the other Livian culture aspects examined in this work. I shall not discuss the nuances of the typology the author presents in this review, since suitable individual features of the artefacts are selected for the author's typology, features that undergo certain traceable stages in their development and transformations from their appearance to disappearance. So, tortoise brooches, their small chain fasteners and dividers, and everything that is hung from them are painstakingly typologized in this work. But I wish to emphasize several main points in this text. In these high-speed internet times, artefact typology looks like an old fashioned and boring job – an end in itself ... or, better yet – pointless. However, this younger generation's Latvian scientist used this “old fashioned” method splendidly, and from what can be gathered from the text, is acquainted with archaeological theory and has mastered the new technologies. On the other hand, typology has old and good traditions in Latvian archaeology; one need only remember, for example, Raul Šnore's published work (*Dzelzs laikmeta latviešu rotas adatas. Latviešu aizvēstures materiāli*, vol. I, Rīga, 1930, pp.39-108) that analysed Late Iron Age pins. It must be emphasized that even later Latvian archaeologists placed huge, often primary importance on typology, just as they still do, as we can see from

the reviewed work's example. But in order to firmly construct a typology, one firstly needs an exceptionally deep knowledge of the material culture, expenditure of time, and thoroughness. A deep knowledge of Livian material culture (a huge volume of material is analysed in the work – 1542 grave complexes and isolated finds), consistent work, and, apparently, a work pursued for several years “gave its fruit” – a reliable typology. A solidly built typology allowed this monograph's author to examine the Livs' culture from various angles. It must be stressed that it was namely the typology that provided R. Spirģis with one of the means which helped to establish the origin of single elements of this multi-component artefact as well as the entire ornament's development.

A reliable chronology of Livian women's multi-component pectoral ornaments, neck-rings, and bracelets is yet another of this painstaking work's successes. As many as three chapters are devoted to chronological problems. It stands to reason that a solid typology of pectoral ornaments and their correlations with other important finds in graves (neck rings, bracelets, and pottery made on a potter's wheel) help to solve chronological problems. Grave complexes, the correlations of these complexes, and burial traditions allowed the author to establish four Livian culture phases. Of course, the abundant finds of coins in the Daugava basin also aided R. Spirģis in solving the chronological problems.

The analysis of these pectoral ornaments showed that tortoise brooches, elements of multicomponent pectoral ornaments, and their compositions all are diverse. The tortoise brooches themselves that are found in Livs' graves are imports, local transformations, and imitations. The appearance of this complex multi-component pectoral ornament was motivated by the Livs' contacts with their closest neighbours and with the Scandinavians. This deduction prompted the author to conclude that the ornament's elements and their décor show the different ethnic nature of the women who wore them. On the other hand, in all respects the various pectoral ornaments allowed the author to consider the Livs' society's social relationships, based on a huge data base.

Thus, the reliable typology of the Daugava Livs' multi-component pectoral ornaments and its inseparable “friend” chronology allowed the author to compare the various combinations of Baltic Finno-Ugrians, ascertaining the cultures' similarities, differences, and mutual influences, to discuss the Scandinavians' and other ethnic groups' influences upon the Livs' culture. Having discussed the typologically well analysed and solidly dated material, the author distinguished the grave

complexes characteristic of the Livian, Vendian, Saami and Estonian, Latgalian and Selonian, as well as Semigallian women in the Daugava basin's material, and indicated how many women of which ethnic groups lived in this region in the examined period (based on grave data). The author's reasoning's concerning the semantic meanings of the Livian women's pectoral ornaments analysed in the monograph are interesting; he links these ornaments with a mythological tripartite world conception. On the other hand, such ornaments of various ethnic groups and that covered women's chests were created just for that – for rendering protection. The Livian jewellers' workshops, the ornaments' production technologies – these also did not escape this monograph's author's outlook.

Thus, the monograph's value lies within the Livs' archaeological material profile which enables an investigation of Livian culture from all possible angles from its formation in the 10th century to its extinguishment at the end of the 13th century. R. Spirģis's monograph *Bruņrupuču saktas ar krūšu važiņrotām un lībiešu kultūras attīstība Daugavas lejtecē 10.–13. gadsimtā* is a fundamental work about the Daugava Livs' 10th-13th century culture.

A book is good when, after reading it, one can say “yes, I learned much” and its information lends arguments for new insights. There is no desire, therefore, to put a period here regarding R. Spirģis's monograph, since the book provokes discussion with its insights.

The Baltic Sea region is examined more as a general Scandinavian cultural area in the monograph, i.e., as a Finno-Ugric and Slavic cultural area in the Viking Period and Early Middle Ages; in my opinion, it lacks a Baltic accent. Ethnic boundary contacts, stimuli, and influences received from their southwestern neighbours – the Curonians – are looked at somewhat less. On the other hand, these are mentioned while discussing the Livs' cultural origins because R. Spirģis maintains that in the second half of the 10th century, Scandinavian colonists, whose material culture was very influenced by the cultures of the Livs and Balts migrated from Northern Curonia to the lower Daugava, where Livian culture had been formed in several stages. Common ornament types do, indeed, link the Curonians and Livs (e.g., neck rings with trumpet terminals and others; see Fig. 116). Bead necklaces with holders for the strings of beads (Figs. 96, 97) were an impetus from Gotland in the 9th/10th-11th centuries both for the Curonians and the Livs; they were distinctively accepted and originally recreated in both cultures. Such examples of strings of beads from Curonain women's graves and the possible cultural interaction from them “slid by” the author. Rectangular chain dividers (Figs. 83-88) are

reminiscent of Curonian flat openwork brooches decorated with plaits; the elements of these ornaments also could be analysed as a result of common East Baltic transformations. All the more so, since the rectangular flat brooches with plaits that were used in place of tortoise brooches to connect the elaborate pectoral sets are very similar to Curonian ornaments. Such rectangular brooches fastened pectoral ornaments in place of the tortoise brooches in the Doles Vampienie u I (grave 154) and Salaspils Laukskolas (grave 230) cemeteries (Figs. 189, 190).

Upon concluding R. Spirģis's monograph's review, I would like once more to congratulate the author on an impressive work – on material about the Daugava Livs' culture that is typologically well categorized and analysed, and chronologically well organized, and to wish the author new insights... and another monograph!

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