

auf dem heutigen lettischen und estnischen Territorium weltliche und geistige „Kleinststaaten“ mit der Gesamtbezeichnung Livland – das häufig fälschlich als Konföderation oder Föderation bezeichnet wird – entstanden, gelangten auch mehrere Charakteristika der mittelalterlichen westeuropäischen christlichen Zivilisation in diese Region, darunter das Christentum selbst, der Feudalismus bzw. das Lehenssystem, das mittelalterliche Städtewesen, die Steinarchitektur und die Schriftlichkeit. In vielen Bereichen erlebte Livland aber über lange Zeit keine Veränderungen, so blieb z. B. die Landwirtschaft bis ins 15. Jahrhundert hinein unverändert.⁵⁸ Die lokalen Gesellschaften im neu begründeten Livland bildeten allerdings, obgleich sie politisch untergeordnet und formal christlich waren, in sozialer, religiöser sowie ethnischer Hinsicht unterschiedliche Sozialstrukturen auf ländlichem Territorien heraus, die ihre soziale und militärischen Autonomie, die Macht ihrer lokalen Stammesfürsten sowie ihre heidnischen Vorstellungen bewahrten. Letztere besaßen ihre Wurzeln in den sozialpolitischen Traditionen, die am Ende der Prähistorie dominiert hatten.

SUMMARY

Chieftaincy and Egalitarianism: Social Relations on the Territory of Latvia during Late Prehistory (10th – 12th Century)

The study of social organisation and power in the prehistoric societies on the territory of Latvia has gained in importance during the last decade, having attracted the attention of several archaeologists and historians since the mid-1990s. The most influential and widespread view remains the one that was established already in the 1920s, which points to the presence of a state organisation among the Lettgallians and the Curonians during the Late Iron Age and on the eve of the Crusades (10th – 12th century). This concept is mostly based on evidence from medieval written sources (the Chronicle of Henry etc.), without reference to archaeological evidence and current social theory.

A critical examination of archaeological sources allows one to posit that late prehistoric societies on the territory of Latvia were organised on the basis of chiefdoms. This article discusses socio-economic and socio-political relations in the late prehistoric chiefdoms. Craft and long-distance trade played an important role in the political economy of the com-

⁵⁸ ĒVALDS MUGURĒVIČS: Vidus- un Austrumlatvija 13.–14. gs. [Mittel- und Ostlettland im 13.–14. Jh.], in: Arheoloģija un etnogrāfija 10 (1973), S. 27-39.

munities and were also related to the emergence of early towns and site hierarchy in the region. The societies were based on kin relations, and both spatial organisation and analysis of burials and artefact distribution reflect the existence of communities with a quite explicit egalitarian ideology. There were only some individuals, agents, who attempted to cross social boundaries in order to expand their individual power and status. Power was based on personal characteristics. Positions in the political hierarchy might be achieved (as well as lost) in competitions where military sources of power played an important role. We may find examples in the Age of the Crusades but indirectly also in Later Prehistory when agents challenged the structure of the established social organisation. There is no evidence about feudal relations until the 13th century crusades. Thus feudalism, among other features of Western Christendom like literacy, Christianity, stone architecture etc. were imported to the Eastern Baltic in the course of the Crusades and slowly replaced the power structures of the prehistoric chiefdoms on the territory of medieval Livonia.