

neuen Machtstrukturen eingegliedert worden ist. Auch der Verlauf der im 13. Jahrhundert erfolgten kulturellen Änderungen und Prozesse konnte verdeutlicht werden. Aus der Sicht der Archäologie wird der Rückschlag, von dem die ländliche Gesellschaft infolge der Kreuzzüge getroffen wurde, als nicht allzu gravierend aufgefasst – eher lassen sich, insbesondere in Nord- und Westestland, unmittelbar nach der Eroberung sogar gewisse Entwicklungen in entgegengesetzter Richtung beobachten.

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SUMMARY

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*Estonia in the 11th–13th centuries: new aspects from the viewpoint of archaeology*

The end of ideological pressure and isolation caused by the Soviet system, as well as developing contacts with archaeological research in the Nordic countries since the mid-1990s have significantly altered scholarly views regarding Estonia in the final stage of the Late Iron Age (the 11<sup>th</sup> – early 13<sup>th</sup> centuries). The egalitarian model of Late Iron Age society which was developed in Estonia during the 1980s and early 1990s (in place of the earlier Marxist-based concept of the formation of the early feudalism), has since been replaced by the concepts of non-egalitarian and socially differentiated pre-state society. Research interests are now mainly concentrated on the topics of social elite, power centres, settlement pattern and territorial structures. On the one hand, society is regarded as rather stratified (the taxation of the common people by the elite and the presence of a permanent taxation system), on the other hand, the territorial reach of power structures has become smaller than before, since the main functioning units are now considered to be hillfort territories rather than prehistoric *kihelkonds*. The late prehistoric forts are no longer regarded as communal defence structures, but as power centres ruled by the nobility. In Saaremaa social developments resemble mostly the Scandinavian pattern and the emergence of nobility is most strongly stressed here. The lack of Latest Iron Age hillforts in present-day Võrumaa county leads to the contention that this area – which presumably lost its power centres as a result of Prince Yaroslav's raid against the Chud around 1030 – was not a part of the Latest Iron Age Ugandi district, but a periphery between more developed territorial units.

In terms of economy, the presence of strip-fields has shown the distribution of communal land between single farmsteads. Recent research in Saaremaa has proved that the production of iron from bog ore in local production centres had obtained proto-industrial dimensions and made iron

an export article. Concerning pottery making, the large share of the production of professional masters from Pskov has been stressed. Numismatic studies outline the large influx of German silver coins in the 12<sup>th</sup> century. In coastal areas research has concentrated on prehistoric harbour sites.

The idea of a unified nation, projected from the national ideology of the 1930s into the Latest Iron Age, no longer finds any expression in archaeology. Instead, greater attention is given to cultural diversity as well as to the presence of local and regional identities – both ethnocultural and territorial. The main differences can be observed between southern and northern/western parts of Estonia, whereas Saaremaa occupies a special position. The Votian areas of Alutaguse should be regarded not as a part of the prehistoric Virumaa district: the population represents a different ethnocultural unit, bound to the same ethnicity found in the Novgorodian territories around Narva River and north-east of Lake Peipsi. A separate ethnocultural unit, formed as a result of the merger of the Finnic substrate and the Latgallian population, existed in the 11<sup>th</sup>–15<sup>th</sup> centuries in the south-easternmost corner of Estonia and in the land of Adzele in north-easternmost Latvia. It becomes evident that the present borders and common identity of Estonia do not arise directly from the Late Iron Age but from other factors – the conquest in the 13<sup>th</sup> century and the developments of the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries.

The archaeological record shows that Latest Iron Age Estonia can be regarded as an „asymmetrical“ and uneven society, in social, cultural, and ethnocultural terms. It can be characterised by the pluralism of local and regional developments, both regarding the power structures and cultural patterns: there existed neither one definite “Estonian” society nor a uniform model for it. Instead of the earlier, Estonia-centred concept, the social and cultural processes are nowadays regarded as a part of broader processes and networks of social developments.

Archaeology has also provided new information about the transition from prehistory to the Middle Ages. The transition period covers most of the 13<sup>th</sup> century, although the processes occurred at different speeds and in different ways in different regions of the country. It shows that in northern and western Estonia where the old social elite was partly involved in the new power structures, these people acted also as mediators of cultural innovations of “European” origin. In the southern parts of the country where the old elite was excluded from power structures, the processes of cultural Europeanization of the natives were slower. Especially long-lasting was the transition period in the eastern peripheries of Livonia. Archaeological and numismatic data suggest that the impact of the Baltic crusades upon local society was not as unambiguously negative impact as is often assumed, especially in northern and western Estonia where during the decades after the conquest even certain developments of an opposite character can be observed.