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### **Log book**

Tony Björk : How to Bury the Dead. A study on regional variations in the southern Baltic area during Late Pre-Roman and Early Roman Iron Age

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## Reviewer 1

### **How to bury the dead.**

#### **A study on regional variations in the southern Baltic area during Late Pre-Roman and Early Roman Iron Age**

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review

The article “How to bury the dead...” presents a comprehensive study on the burial customs in the south Baltic zone. The Author has analyzed different regions in this area, comparing the graves and cemeteries dated to Late Pre-Roman and Early Roman Iron Age in many aspects. On the list of his interests there are i.a. the size of the cemeteries and their arrangement, the visible constructions (mounds, stone settings ect.), treatment of the body in inhumation graves, boat burials, artefact types and their composition, regional variations, influence markers and last but not least the contacts in the region in question. Such long list of the analyzed features combined with the large geographic area with very different research tradition seem to be the big challenge and very difficult task, but the Author has solved these problems with very good results. It would be worth to underline the clear structure of the article. Before embarking on the analysis proper the Author presented the theoretical framework and – what is even more important in such comprehensive studies – the source critical considerations.

The Author selected 30 cemeteries from Sweden, Denmark, Germany and Poland. In Sweden there are necropolis located in Öland, Blekinge and Scania, in Denmark – in Bornholm, Zealand, Langeland and Fyn, in Germany – in Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, in Poland – Zachodniopomorskie, Pomorskie i Warmińsko-Mazurskie Voivodeships. A question arises why among Swedish regions there is not Gotland, for example Barshalder cemetery (M. Rundkvist, *Barshalder. A cemetery in Gröfvingbo and Fide parishes, Gotland, Sweden, c. AD 1–1000. Excavations and finds 1826–1971*, volume 1-2, Stockholm 2003). May be there was a good reason to omit Gotland, but it would be worth to explain it. The Author underlined the different research traditions in different countries. For example in Polish archaeology there is a tradition to describe the particular sites, including cemeteries in the framework of their cultural features, using the terms of cultural units (cultures, groups – see P. Kaczanowski, *Zur kulturgeschichtlichen Taxonomie des mittel- und nordeuropäischen Barbaricums*. In: U. Lund Hansen, A. Bitner-Wróblewska (eds), *Worlds apart? Contacts across the Baltic Sea in the Iron Age. Network Denmark-Poland, 2005-2008*. Nordiske Fortidsminder, Serie C, volume 7. København-Warszawa 2010, p. 49-57). All cemeteries from northern Poland mentioned in the article belong to the Wielbark Culture, some with the earlier stage of Oksywie Culture. Why did the Author not use such terminology? Sometimes in the article there is a term “Wielbark cemetery” – rather unclear in this context. What does it mean? A Wielbark Culture cemetery? A cemetery in Wielbark locality? (on the margin there is a cemetery in Malbork-Wielbark – see for example J. Kleemann, J. Chanko, M. Chmiel-Chrzanowska, K. Misterek, *Wielbark Archaeological Field School – Ausgrabungen in Malbork-Wielbark (pomorskie) in den Jahren 2014 und 2015*. In: E. Trawicka (ed.), *XX Sesja Pomorzoznawcza*, Gdańsk 2018, p. 125-140, with earlier literature).

The different chronological systems used in the southern Baltic zone become another challenge in any over-regional studies. Differences in terminology, differences in absolute dating, differences among the main chronological indicators make problematic the transferring of regional subdivisions distinguished for one region to the other. May be the schematic diagram correlating the terms used by archaeologists in different countries could be very helpful. The Author has chosen a very basic chronological subdivisions: pRIA (pre-

Roman Iron Age), EpRIA (Early pre-Roman Iron Age), Lp-RIA (Late pre-Roman Iron Age), ERIA (Early Roman Iron Age), LRIA (Late Roman Iron Age), MP (Migration Period). It seems that it's a good solution in such complicated phenomenon as different chronological systems in wide territory. However in the case of single graves or particular cemeteries he based on the dating in publications, what makes their chronology rather incompatible. The Author gave a general overview of the cemeteries' dating in particular regions, but it would be useful to add short comments on the chronology of 30 selected cemeteries – in spite their phasing is presented in the table 1.

The selected cemeteries from Sweden, Denmark, Germany and Poland vary in size, spatial development, presence of cremation and inhumation graves, presence of visible grave monuments like stone settings, standing stones, cairn, mounds. Some regularities can be observed like the more frequent presence of visible grave monuments in southern Sweden or the distribution of mounds (more frequent in Denmark, Germany and Poland). One of the observation concerns the size of the cemeteries – “there are no really large cemeteries in Zealand and southern Sweden [...] in strong contrast to Germany and Poland”. The question arise – why? – geographical conditions? the differences in social development? differences in settlement systems? In the article there is no attempt to try to answer this question and even to ask it.

Discussing the spatial distribution of graves in particular necropolis the Author compared cemetery in Istaby (Sweden) and in Pruszcz Gdański (Poland). They both were established in pRIA, however the Pruszcz Gdański cemetery had a longer continuity until C2 while the Istaby one had only a few graves dating later than phase B2. There are similarities in burial custom (both had a binary burial custom), but dissimilarities in size (Istaby is a medium size cemetery, Pruszcz Gdański a large cemetery). Comparing the spatial development of both cemeteries there is possible to notice that in Istaby there are clear grouping of graves forming clusters used by different family groups. The Author noted the similar phenomenon in Pruszcz Gdański with separate units and he connected them with social groups. However it seems that the spatial development of Pruszcz Gdański cemetery is different and connected rather with the chronology of graves and the development of the cemetery in time and space. The clusters of graves are connected with their dating (comp. Fig. 3–6 in M. Pietrzak, *Pruszcz Gdański, Fundstelle 10. Ein Gräberfeld der Oksywie- und Wielbark-Kultur in Ostpommern*. Monumenta Archaeologica Barbarica, volume IV, Kraków 1997). May be the comparison of similar in size, completely excavated cemeteries with similar long-term perspective like Pruszcz Gdański and Slusegård would bring more compatible results.

There is an interesting overview of the burial custom and the treatment of the body in the southern Baltic area. It turned out that Zealand had strong restrictions in burial custom with the only inhumation graves where the dead was placed mostly in the crouched position while in the other regions there were binary burial systems and the proportions between cremation and inhumation graves vary in time and space. In most areas there is a preference to place the dead on their backs with dominated north-south orientation. This orientation is the most customary in northern Poland what noticed the Author, but it's a pity that he did not give any comments to fascinating observation from Weklice cemetery where there is a number of graves with totally different orientation, namely east-west and what is even more fascinating those inhumation graves are dated to the earliest phase of the cemetery – stadium IA (see Fig. 7 – M. Natuniewicz-Sekuła, J. Okulicz-Kozaryn, *Weklice. A cemetery of the Wielbark Culture on the Eastern Margin of Vistula Delta (Excavations 1984-2004)*. Monumenta Archaeologica Barbarica XVII, Warszawa 2011, p. 134). Is there a group of foreigners / newcomers who established this cemetery? Wherefrom they came? This

phenomenon in Weklice is worth to comment when one is studying the contacts among different regions in the southern Baltic area.

A quite big part of the article concerns the different aspects of the artefacts – the distribution of artefact types in different regions, their variation, composition and number in graves, correspondence analysis. It's very interesting overview offering the readers the comprehensive analysis of finds. What is important there are no finds from elite burials, but those occurred in graves connected with the lower stratum of the society. There are many researches concerning the elite and their position in the local and interregional society, so it's especially interesting to follow the analysis touching the other group of the society from the southern Baltic area. The Author pointed out the artefacts with the great regional significance (leather knives, sickles/scythes, scissors, arm rings, weapons), but also this with over-regional significance like meander decorated pottery. He observed some tendencies in different regions or general, for example the strict regional ritual systems, the standardized composition of items, the changing in expression the position of dead (from production into status). The chapter "Correspondence analysis" concerns to a lesser degree the results of the correspondence analysis (what in Author's opinion is not enough clear), but mostly the social aspects what is very inspiring.

The contacts across the southern Baltic zone became one of the subject studied by the Author carefully both in the aspects on very local scale and the regional scale. The first can be illustrated by the comparison of connections of two cemeteries from Sweden – Hammarsnäs and Istaby. Both sites had contacts across the Baltic Sea, but in the case of Hammarsnäs it concerned short distance connections, while in the case of Istaby much farer ones. A special position in the region placed Bornholm being as a hub for sea transportation of items and ideas (for example compare distribution of boat graves also presented in the article). Writing about contacts in previous interpretations and the problem of the Gothic tribes the Author mentioned several scholars, but omitted Ryszard Wołagiewicz and Andrzej Kokowski – both very important for the history of research this subject in 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries. The Author has very good knowledge of the literature, so it may surprise the readers.

Studying the southern Baltic area the Author pointed out a number of similarities and differences between the cemeteries and regions. He described the common features connected with the burial customs, the changes in rituals, but also the rituals norms. In his opinion there is a "mutual mental superstructure, spread in the areas populated by Germanic people". It seems to be a well-founded conclusion.

## Reviewer 2

### How to bury the dead.

p. 1 The section **Background and aim** is an excellent section.

p. 2 The section **Theoretical approaches** ..... I think this is too long a section for the current media – a paper in a journal. If this was a section in a larger work, such as a thesis, it would be fine, but here I would suggest a more summarised version.

p. 4 **Source critical considerations.** p. 5. This section emphasizes the difficulties in equalizing burial sites in Denmark and Sweden. This is a brilliant section.

p. 6 **Studied areas.** No comments

p. 7 **Chronological systems & Chronology of the cemeteries:** a good and clear segment.

p. 9 **Cemetery size .... Visible grave monuments** No comments

p. 12 **The visible...** ok

p. 14 **Burial custom – treatment ...** ok

p. 15 **Regional variation** ok

p. 18 **Burial customs and artefacts ...** ok

p. 19 **The composition ... Number of artefacts...** ok

p. 23 **Correspondence ...** There is a lack of consideration of whether it is feasible to use Pruszcz Gdański as a representative for the entire northern Polish burial material. Additionally, the very interesting Fig. 12 merits further discussion.

p. 26 **Position of objects...** ok

p. 27 **Variation.....** ok

p. 30 **Influence markers** ok

p. 32 **Boat burials...** ok

p. 32 **Contacts in light.....** p. 33. The connection from Skåne to the south east, almost rounding the classical Celtic area in the pre-Roman Iron Age is rightly emphasised – a route that can be seen over long periods of time. Adam Cielinski, Thomas Hauptmann and Lene Heidemann Lutz should also be mentioned here.

The connections between Sjælland-Bornholm-Northern Poland and Sweden-Bornholm-Northern Poland are emphasised, as well as the breaks in these contacts, as previously mentioned by several archaeologists.

p. 34. ”.....but there is no doubt that there are or were no pure cultural groups other than as our mental constructions.” This is an important comment, which definitely should be expanded upon. I agree with this comment, but since most archaeologists in Poland do not, an extensive discussion would be important.

p. 34 **Conclusions and comments** p. 34. “I have focused a lot on the differences between the different regions, and there are indeed differences. The lasting impression is however the great similarities.” This is an important conclusion, in spite of the previously mentioned differences in e.g. burial customs in Sjælland and a number of the other areas under study.

p. 36. “A common database ....”. That is a great idea, but seems utopian.

**My conclusion:** An excellent work, although some sections are too long, seeing that this is a paper. There is not much new material here, and thus an expanded section of the information on p. 34 could contribute with new ideas to the discussion.

## Author's comments

### **Authors comment on the referees points of views on "How to bury the dead".**

I'm very thankful for the response from the referees on my article. Both have delivered good views, and I have followed much of their advice. Their views are somewhat different, but they complete each other. Below I have chosen to give an account only on views where the referees suggests shortening, clarifications and further developing, and added my comments.

### **Referee 1**

"A question arises why among Swedish regions there is not Gotland, for example Barshalder cemetery (M. Rundkvist, Barshalder. A cemetery in Grötlingbo and Fide parishes, Gotland, Sweden, ...). May be there was a good reason to omit Gotland, but it would be worth to explain it."

- Relevant question. The simple answer is that I chose a geographic area and made some minor additions. Gotland stands out as very special (a well as Zealand), for instance since it almost completely lacks graves with sickles or scythes, which otherwise is a common trait in mainland Sweden as well as on Öland. Nevertheless I saw fit to limit the study to the southern Baltic area, since I think the chosen area is large enough to discuss regional variation.

"The Author underlined the different research traditions in different countries. For example in Polish archaeology there is a tradition to describe the particular sites, including cemeteries in the framework of their cultural features, using the terms of cultural units ... All cemeteries from northern Poland mentioned in the article belong to the Wielbark Culture, some with the earlier stage of Oksywie Culture. Why did the Author not use such terminology? Sometimes in the article there is a term "Wielbark cemetery" – rather unclear in this context. What does it mean? A Wielbark Culture cemetery? A cemetery in Wielbark locality?"

- Another good point. I have tried to refine the terminology in the revised version of the text. At the same time I think it is valuable to point out the argument from Referee 2, below, on why I should develop the thoughts on cultures as our mental constructions.

"The different chronological systems used in the southern Baltic zone become another challenge in any over-regional studies. ... May be the schematic diagram correlating the terms used by archaeologists in different countries could be very helpful. The Author has chosen a very basic chronological subdivision ... It seems that it's a good solution in such complicated phenomenon as different chronological systems in wide territory. However in the case of single graves or particular cemeteries he based on the dating in publications, what makes their chronology rather incompatible. The Author gave a general overview of the cemeteries' dating in particular regions, but it would be useful to add short comments on the chronology of 30 selected cemeteries – in spite their phasing is presented in the table 1."

- As it is explained in the section "Source critical considerations" I deliberately avoided to go too deep into the chronological subdivision in the different regions. But the comment clearly showed me the need for a short extra note in the text to table 1 to explain some of the general abbreviations and also to explain or remove some of the abbreviations with a reference to purely Scandinavian context.

"One of the observation concerns the size of the cemeteries – "there are no really large cemeteries in Zealand and southern Sweden [...] in strong contrast to Germany and Poland". The question arise – why? – geographical conditions? the differences in social development? differences in settlement systems? In the article there is no attempt to try to answer this question and even to ask it."

- I have taken this to heart and provided a short comment on this subject in the revised version of the manuscript.

Regarding the comparison between Istaby and Pruszc Gdański: "There are similarities in burial custom (both had a binary burial custom), but dissimilarities in size (Istaby is a medium size cemetery, Pruszc Gdański a large cemetery). Comparing the spatial development of both cemeteries there is possible to notice that in Istaby there are clear grouping of graves forming clusters used by different family groups. The Author noted the similar phenomenon in Pruszc Gdański with separate units and he connected them with social groups. However it seems that the spatial development of Pruszc Gdański cemetery is different and connected rather with the chronology of graves and the development of the cemetery in time and space. The clusters of graves are connected with their dating ... Maybe the comparison of similar in size, completely excavated cemeteries with similar long-term perspective like Pruszc Gdański and Slusegård would bring more compatible results."

- I am of the opinion that I clearly give an account of the spatial growth of the Pruszc Gdański cemetery and that the discussion of a possible division is a tendency I note, but that it has only a weak support in the chronological allocation. The opinion that a comparison between Pruszc Gdański and Slusegård would give more compatible results are fully valid. The choice to compare Istaby and Pruszc Gdański was made, right or wrong, because I wanted to compare two cemeteries with some clear differences.

"There is an interesting overview of the burial custom and the treatment of the body in the southern Baltic area. ... In most areas there is a preference to place the dead on their backs with dominated north-south orientation. ... from Weklce cemetery where there is a number of graves with totally different orientation, namely east-west and what is even more fascinating those inhumation graves are dated to the earliest phase of the cemetery – stadium IA ... Is there a group of foreigners / newcomers who established this cemetery? Wherefrom they came? This phenomenon in Weklce is worth to comment when one is studying the contacts among different regions in the southern Baltic area."

- The Weklce cemetery is clearly interesting in this respect, and I agree that this could be seen as influence from some other region, but the problem would deserve be developed as a separate investigation. There are occasional east-west oriented graves on several cemeteries, for instance on Zealand and in Scania, although they are not as numerous as the north-south oriented. One cemetery stand out as peculiar since all its inhumations are east-west oriented – the Valleberga cemetery in Scania. So far only 12 graves has been excavated at the site, with 7 inhumations and 5 cremations (not specifically selected for comparison in table 1). The

dating is between Late pre-roman and B2 (Björk 2005:88f, 213). The Slusegård and Snaphøj cemeteries on Bornholm are also a links to Weklisce, since they contained some early east-west oriented inhumations (Lind 1991, Rasmussen 2010).

”Writing about contacts in previous interpretations and the problem of the Gothic tribes the Author mentioned several scholars, but omitted Ryszard Wołagiewicz and Andrzej Kokowski – both very important for the history of research this subject in 20th and 21st centuries. The Author has very good knowledge of the literature, so it may surprise the readers.”

- When referring to the question of the Gothic tribes I chose to mention the works I had read, which only reveals that my knowledge of the subject is limited. On the other hand the referred works did in fact include Kokowski on page 9 of the original manuscript.

## **Referee 2**

”Afsnittet Theoretical approaches ..... finder jeg, selv om det er vigtigt for hele artiklen, for langt, fordi det her bringes som del af en tidsskrifts-artikel – i modsætning til, hvis det udgjorde en del af en større afhandling. Jeg vil anbefale en sammenskrivning. ”

- To those who don't read Scandinavian languages the referee suggests a shortening of the section “Theoretical approaches ...”, as it is too long for an article. This is something I would reluctantly do, since the article is a part of my quest to define and understand the regional differences in burial customs during the pre-roman and roman iron age. In my view this article, and thus also the part on theoretical approaches, is closely connected to my earlier works on the topic.

”Correspondence ... jeg savner overvejelser, om det er bærbart at benytte Pruszcz Gdański som repræsentant for hele det nordlige Polens gravfundsmateriale. Endvidere burde den meget interessante fig. 12 kommenteres mere.”

- The referee questions whether Pruszcz Gdański could be used as for representing the whole of northern Poland in the section Correspondence .... The referee also finds that the interesting Figure 12 should be commented on further. These are good points. I have taken this to heart and supplemented the text about the choice of Pruszcz Gdański specifically. Figure 12 has likewise been supplemented with an extended comment in the revised version of the manuscript.

”p. 34. ”.....but there is no doubt that there are or were no pure cultural groups other than as our mental constructions.” Vigtig bemærkning, som i høj grad burde uddybes – jeg er enig i dette udsagn – men fordi de fleste arkæologer i Polen ikke mener dette – ville en udførlig begrundelse være vigtig.”

- The referee thinks the above mentioned statement is important and wants me to deepen this thought since most archaeologists in Poland don't agree with this viewpoint. I'm not so sure about that, but in general terms I agree that it is important to argue the case a little further, but not here though. To do it would lead to a more extensive discussion about the concept of culture, the difference between material culture and social culture, such as norms and values, how different archaeologists use the concept of culture etc., which I find beyond the aim of investigating regional conditions in the grave material.



”Min konklusion: et udmærket arbejde, dog er nogle afsnit for omstændelige/for lange i relation til, at det er en artikel. I virkeligheden fremkommer der ikke så mange nyheder i arbejdet, og derfor kunne netop udsagnet på p. 34, hvis det blev udfoldet og argumenteret for, bidrage med nye tanker.”

- The referee thinks that the work is excellent, but that some sections are too long and too cumbersome for an article. There are not so many new facts in the work and for that reason the part on page 34 (mentioned above) could contribute with new thoughts if it was developed and argued for. I do not agree with the part that some sections are too long. I would argue that there are few research contributions trying to discuss regional variation in the ritual system based on a broad study of cemeteries and graves in this particular area and time period. The trend has rather been to compare high status graves, certain artifacts or grave monuments. This may lead to a cumbersome accounting of well known facts to a small group of well informed scholars, but I hope my contribution will also reach people who are not experts on burial customs in all parts of the southern Baltic area.

- My final comment is that the two referees have made very different and valuable suggestions to make my article better. It is very clear that they are scholars who know the field of research very well and also that they come from different countries, with different research traditions. This has been very valuable to me. Their opinions have given me a chance to make several different improvements. I do not agree with all of their opinions, but I am very grateful and pleased that they have found my work interesting. With their examination and help I think the article has been improved compared to the original version.