

# The Scandinavian Settlement at Grobiņa, Latvia.

The connections between the settlement,  
the local population and Gotland



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Author: Daniel Gunnarsson

School of Culture, Energy and Environment

Supervisor: Alexander Andreeff

## **Abstract**

In the town of Grobiņa in Latvia several cemeteries with grave goods and burial traditions that could be linked to Gotland have been excavated, as well as cemeteries of local type. The town itself has been interpreted as the site of a Vendel age settlement, possibly beginning around 650 AD. The aim of this thesis is to study the characteristics of the settlement and in particular its relation to Gotland. A study of the age of circular disc brooches discovered in and around Grobiņa has also been carried out as a part of the analysis. This type of brooches is very typical for Gotland during Vendel and Viking age.

I Grobiņa i västra Lettland har ett flertal vendeltida gravfält med gravgåvor och begravningstraditioner som kan kopplas till Gotland påträffats. Även gravfält av lokal typ har påträffats. Grobiņa har tolkats som platsen för en vendeltida bosättning, möjligen grundad cirka 650 e. Kr. Syftet med uppsatsen är att studera bosättningens karaktär, och i synnerhet dess förhållande till Gotland. En studie av de dosformade spännen som påträffats i och omkring Grobiņa har också genomförts som en del av analysen. Denna typ av spännen är typisk för Gotland under vendel- och vikingatid.

Keywords: Grobiņa, Couronians, Gotland, Baltic Sea, Circular disc brooches, trade centres, Vendel Age

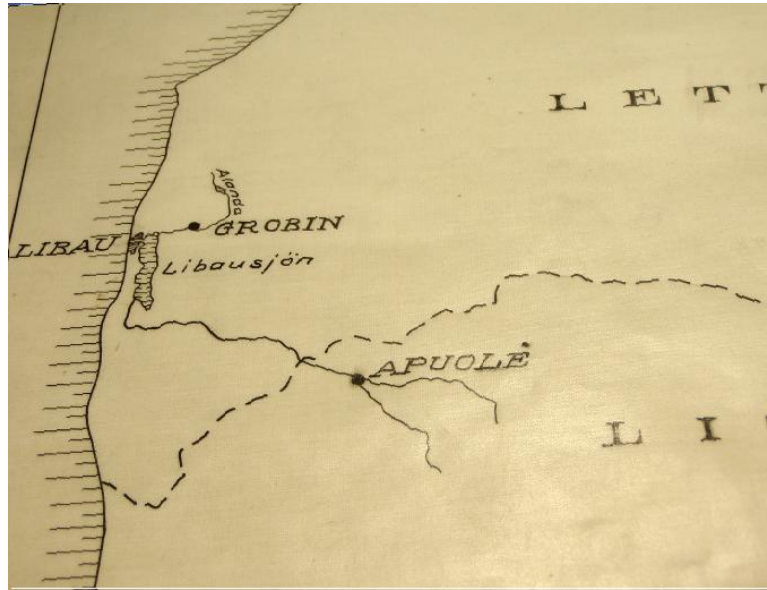
## Table of Contents

|   |    |
|---|----|
| 1. Introduction .....   | 5  |
| 1.1 The aim of the thesis .....   | 6  |
| 1.2 A short note of chronology in Sweden and Latvia.....                                    | 6  |
| 1.3 Definitions.....  | 6  |
| 2. The material .....   | 7  |
| 2.1 Previous science and criticism of sources .....   | 8  |
| 3. Background.....  | 10 |
| 3.1 Grobiņa today, recent history .....   | 10 |
| 3.2 Overview of the discovered cemeteries in the area of Grobiņa: .....                     | 10 |
| 4. Other archaeological monuments .....   | 14 |
| 4.1 The picture stone.....  | 14 |
| 5. The settlement .....   | 15 |
| 5.1 Background to the migration.....  | 15 |
| 5.2 Grobiņa-Seeburg? .....  | 15 |
| 5.3 The Settlement at Grobiņa .....   | 16 |
| 5.4 The Hill fort in Grobiņa.....   | 17 |
| 5.5 Outside the main settlement.....  | 17 |
| Discussion part: .....  | 17 |
| 6. Comparing Grobiņa with centres of trade and crafts .....                                 | 18 |
| 6.1 Settlements for comparison.....   | 18 |
| 6.2 A comparison between Grobiņa and known contemporary centers of trade<br>and crafts..... | 19 |
| 7. The Settlement of Grobiņa .....  | 20 |
| 7.1 The settlement in the light of recent discoveries.....                                  | 20 |
| 7.2 The end of the settlement.....  | 21 |
| 8. Analysis.....  | 22 |

|  |    |
|--|----|
| 8.1 Presentation of the material (cirkular disc brooches)..... | 22 |
| 8.2 Analysis of the brooches .....                             | 23 |
| 9. Conclusions .....   | 23 |
| 9.1 Results from the analysis of brooches.....                 | 23 |
| 9.2 Interpretations.....                                       | 24 |
| 10. Summary.....   | 26 |
| 11. Sources.....   | 27 |

## 1. Introduction

The site in the western part of Latvia today known as Grobiņa is believed to have been settled about 650 AD by Scandinavians from both Gotland and the area of Lake Mälaren, west of today's Stockholm. According to earlier theories this settlement was believed to have lasted until the end of the 9<sup>th</sup> century AD. The inhabitants would then have been driven away by force. However, most archaeologists today believe that the settlers were



*(Photo from Nerman, unpublished material)*

gradually assimilated into the Couronian population. Several excavations have taken place in Grobiņa, the first already in 1929 and 1930. These were led by the Swedish archaeologist Birger Nerman, who formulated many of the early theories. Rather than a military base or colony, as the earlier theories suggested, Grobiņa is today usually interpreted as a centre of trade and crafts. In this thesis, I will compare the characteristics of some known contemporary centres of trade and crafts in the Baltic Sea area with what has been discovered in Grobiņa. This year, the archaeological site of Grobiņa was nominated to the UNESCO world heritage list as a joint heritage of "Viking culture" together with sites in Denmark, Norway and Iceland.

In older literature the settlement in Grobiņa is usually mentioned as a colony. The early theories presented by Birger Nerman clearly viewed the settlement in Grobiņa as a colony, established as a military base by the king in Birka. The foundation for this theory is a line in Rimbert's chronicle over the apostle Anskarius, in which it is stated that "far from them [the Svear] was a people named the Couronians (Cori), which had once been subject to the Svear, but had recently rebelled and had refused to remain subjugated" (Rimbert 1986, 58). As Nerman held the view that Sweden had been united as a state already by then, he interpreted this stated dominance as colonization in the modern sense. That Sweden should have been united as a kingdom before the Middle Ages is a view shared by few historians today. Most archaeologists today agree that Grobiņa was a centre of trade rather than a colony. Also, as the expression colony today is a word used in a negative sense, I will in this thesis instead refer to Grobiņa in 7<sup>th</sup> to 9<sup>th</sup> century as a settlement.

## 1.1 The aim of the thesis

The aim of the thesis will be to study the characteristics of the settlement of Grobiņa, and in particular its relations with Gotland and the local population of Couronia. The main question of the thesis is to interpret whether it can be established that Grobiņa was an early centre of trade and craft during the Vendel Age; much like Birka, Staraja Ladoga, Fröjel and others. In order to interpret this, the following questions will have to be answered:

- In which ways is Grobiņa similar and different from the known contemporary centres of trade and crafts around the Baltic Sea?
- What was the settlement's relation to Gotland?
- What was the local population's relation to the settlement?

A study of the age of circular disc brooches discovered in and around Grobiņa will also be carried out, connected with the questions of the settlements relation to Gotland and the local population.

## 1.2 A short note of chronology in Sweden and Latvia

In Swedish chronology, the period 550-800 AD is referred to as Vendeltid (Vendel period) named after the Vendel Parish, north of Uppsala, where rich boat graves from this period has been discovered. However, in classic Latvian chronology the period 400-800 AD is referred to as Vidējais Dzelzs Laikmets (Middle Iron Age). To avoid confusion, this thesis will refer to time mostly in centuries and calendar years AD.

## 1.3 Definitions

*Barrow:* A barrow can, depending on what period and area refer to quite different forms of graves. In this thesis, the term barrow refers to a small artificial structure of sand, covering a single grave. The structures are 3-15 meters in diameter, and range between 0, 1 and 1, 4 meters in height.

*Barrow cemetery:* A barrow cemetery is a cemetery where the graves are covered by a small, artificial mound of earth, stone or sand. In the area of Grobiņa, all known barrows are constructed of sand.

*Flat cemetery:* A flat cemetery is a cemetery without any visible markings above ground, as opposite of a barrow cemetery. This makes it harder to identify them without excavation. During the first millennia AD, this was the style of burial of the people of Gotland, the Couronians and several other archaeological cultures in Latvia.

*Circular disc brooches:* This kind of brooches is very specific for Gotland in the period of the settlement of Grobiņa. As the name suggests, the brooches are made up of a round metal disc, with a rim. The rims are of different size. These brooches are sometimes referred to as box brooches, since their rim makes them look like a small, round jewellery box.

*Hill Fort:* Hill forts were a quite common form of settlement during certain periods in the Baltic area. They first appeared around 1000 BC but decreased significantly in number during the last centuries BC, possibly due to social changes connected with the introduction of iron (Vasks 1999: 33pp, 41). However, hill forts had a renaissance around 600 AD and both old ones were rebuilt and new ones established. A typical hill fort was built on a natural hill and was protected by a wooden palisade. Sometimes ditches were also dug and sides steepened for further protection. From the archaeological evidence, it appears as if the hill forts in Latvia were usually permanently inhabited (Vasks 1999: 56 pp).

*Scandinavians:* In this thesis, the term Scandinavian is used to refer to inhabitants of the Scandinavian area in general, including Svear, Gotlandic people and others.

*Svear:* As Swedes today refer to inhabitants of Sweden, I have chosen instead to refer to the inhabitants of the area around Lake Mälaren as Svear. This choice of word was made not to confuse this group with the fairly modern ethnicity of Swedes, and to make clear that no state resembling the modern kingdom of Sweden probably existed before the Middle Age.

*Couronians:* The term Couronians (Kurši in Latvian) does in this thesis refer to the Iron Age culture of western Latvia. This group is probably the same as the one referred to as *Cori* in *Vita Ansgarii* (Rimbert 1986, 58).

## **2. Methods and material**

Apart from the literature studies in the thesis, the analysis of one material group from the excavations will be included. The circular disc brooches are one of the most distinctly Gotlandic groups of finds from Grobiņa. Within the theme of this thesis, a study of the circular disc brooches found in Grobiņa will be carried out. According to a hypothesis by Swedish archaeologist Lena Thunmark-Nylén, the settling in western Latvia by families moving from Gotland happened during quite a short time, and no new wave of settlers followed. Pointing to this is that several of the circular disc brooches and other objects discovered were very worn, and had been used in other ways than they were originally intended (Thunmark- Nylén 1983b, 315 pp). Thus my hypothesis is, if the theory is correct, the circular disc brooches in the cemeteries of Grobiņa should all be of approximately the same age. As I have no possibility of studying the material first hand, I will have to rely on photos and measurements of

them, as well as literature and Birger Nermans notes from the excavations (Appendix I; Birger Nerman, unpublished material).

I am aware that only using female objects for analysis might give an unbalanced view of the situation. However, the male dresses of this period are quite uniform in the Baltic Sea area, at least as far as can be observed in the archaeological material. An analysis of male objects discovered in Grobiņa would probably do little to answer the questions of this thesis. Swedish archaeologist Lena Thunmark Nylén has presented an interesting theory of localized female cultures and a more globalized male culture in the Baltic Sea area. As the objects connected to women have a greater degree of local variation than those connected to men. Thunmark Nylén presents a modern time parallel, possibly mirroring the situation of Iron Age; a seaman's wife on the island of Fårö. Her husband had travelled around the world several times, but she herself had never even set foot on "mainland" Gotland (Thunmark Nylén 1990, 50 pp). Unfortunately, there is not space to cover this theory in detail in this thesis.

Another problem is that most of the circular disc brooches in Grobiņa were not discovered by archaeologists (appendix I). However, I see no reason to that any of them should have been found anywhere else than in Grobiņa or the immediate surroundings, even if the exact circumstances of discovery in some cases are unknown.

The chronology of the brooches used in this thesis is the one established by Danish archaeologist Karen Høilund Nielsen for female grave goods from Gotland. The typology is based on correspondence analyses with other grave goods, and in which cases they are found together in graves over time. A typology was then based on the different elements on the brooches, and it could be observed that the size of the rim consequently increased over time (Høilund Nielsen 1999, 167, 189).

## **2.1 Previous science and criticism of sources**

It should first be mentioned that Latvian archaeology was still in its cradle by the time the first excavations took place. The law of Protection of monuments had passed only in 1923, and very few experienced ethnic Latvian archaeologists did yet exist at that point. One of these few was Francis Balodis, one of the archaeologists involved in excavating Grobiņa, and also a key figure in Latvian archaeology of the interwar period. Archaeology in Latvia was at the time still largely based on the writings by the Baltic German scientists. Though the work these early scientists did in collecting, systematizing and publishing should be recognized, they were also somewhat influenced by the German *Kulturträger* (culture-bearer) concept, and a wish to justify German dominance in the Baltic countries. Thus, the influence of incoming cultures was stressed, and in particular the influence by Germanic peoples such as Scandinavians (Vasks 1999, 3pp).



During Soviet time, archaeological research in Latvia was mostly limited to typological and chronological studies, as the Marxist theories could not be questioned. Archaeology was however not under such hard ideological pressure as history, since “*The Soviet political elite did not consider prehistory an important field for class and ideological war*” (Vasks 1999: 7). Still, this meant that the early theories on Grobiņa mentioned before remained practically unchanged in Latvia until the late 1980ies, when the political climate again allowed for a more open debate. Also, the interest was revitalized by the discoveries from the new excavations in the Courland Project, which had been carried out during this decade (Petrenko 1990, 41 pp).

A few words should be said about the literature used in this thesis. Despite that Birger Nerman’s book *Grobin-Seeburg* was published already in 1958, it remains the most thorough examination published of the discoveries in Grobiņa, and thus quite essential for any study on the subject. More modern interpretations can be found in the small booklet *The archaeological monuments of Grobiņa* written by Valerij Petrenko and Juris Urtāns in 1995 as well as in *Kurši Senatnē/Couronians in Antiquity* published by the Latvian National Museum of History in 2008. Much of the information on the different cemeteries I have taken from an article in *Fornvännen* written by Latvian archaeologist Eduards Šturms in 1949. It should however be noted that Eduards Šturms at that point probably had no access to any of the material, as he had been forced to flee Latvia in 1944 (Vijups 1999: 123).

There is an almost complete absence of the local Couronians in Birger Nerman’s interpretations, except mentioning that they were apparently subject to the Svear (Nerman 1958). Partially this may be explained by the fact that most of the Couronian cemeteries were then yet undiscovered, but there also have from the beginning of excavations in Grobiņa and until today been a tendency to focus on the Scandinavian elements. This has possibly had some negative effect on the state of the archaeological monument. Archaeologists Valerij Petrenko and Juris Urtāns stated that: “*One of the reasons for the poor state of the monument at Grobiņa appears to be the strange fact that, in spite of their prominent position in the research of local and foreign scholars, the monuments have remained alien for the population of Liepāja and even Grobiņa*” (Petrenko, Urtāns 1995, 4). A reason for this could be the inhabitants of Grobiņa feeling no connection to this “alien” archaeological monument, as the Scandinavian background of it is the only one usually mentioned. Recently, though, Grobiņa city council has launched an ambitious project for the development of the community. One of the aims of this project is to raise awareness for the values of the cultural monuments in the area, including the cemeteries and remains of settlement (Grobinanovads.lv).

## **3. Background**

### **3.1 Grobiņa today, recent history**

Grobiņa is a small town in western Latvia situated along the Ālande River, a few kilometers east of the city of Liepāja. The name Grobiņa was first mentioned in 1253, with the surrender of many of the villages in Couronia to the Livonian Order (Stašulāne 2008, 147). Just ten years after this, during the Couronian uprising, the wooden hill fort in Grobiņa was attacked and burned by the Livonian Order. A stone castle was then built next to where the hill fort had been, the ruins of this are still visible today. During the Swedish-Polish war the village Grobiņa was burned by Swedish troops in 1659. Forty years later, in 1695 Grobiņa was given city rights, and was granted its coat of arms two years later. During more recent history, the city has suffered plague in 1710, was captured by the Napoleonic armies in 1812 and by the German army during WWI in 1915. Grobiņa has today about 4200 inhabitants, and is a part of Liepāja district. This year, the archaeological site of Grobiņa was nominated to the UNESCO world heritage list as a joint heritage of “Viking culture” together with sites in Denmark, Norway and Iceland (Grobiņasnovads.lv; UNESCO.org).

Unfortunately, a lot of the cemeteries and other archaeological sites in Grobiņa are today destroyed or changed beyond recognition. Already when Swedish scholar Birger Nerman first reported about his discoveries in 1930; he wrote that much of the Priediens cemetery had been damaged by the extraction of gravel on the site. The damage to the sites has since then been made even worse by the Second World War and later economic activities in Grobiņa. These activities include the building of a horse farm on the Priediens cemetery, and the growth of the modern town of Grobiņa. A small exhibition with information about the Scandinavian settlement and finds from the excavations is today presented in the City Council Building of Grobiņa (Nerman 1930b; Petrenko, Urtāns 1995, 4, 12).

### **3.2 Overview of the discovered cemeteries in the area of Grobiņa:**

The most thoroughly investigated objects in Grobiņa are the cemeteries. Most frequently mentioned are the three cemeteries interpreted as Scandinavian in origin; Priediens barrow cemetery, Rudzūkalni (Smukumi) cemetery no. 1 and Porāni cemetery. Apart from these usually mentioned cemeteries, also the cemeteries interpreted as Couronian will be presented here. Also, several smaller cemeteries interpreted as of possible Scandinavian origin located relatively close to Grobiņa will be presented.

#### *3.2.1 Scandinavian cemeteries in Grobiņa:*

##### Priediens barrow cemetery (Priediens II)

Priediens barrow cemetery was the first discovered of the cemeteries that have been interpreted as Scandinavian. It is also the most thoroughly examined cemetery in the area around Grobiņa. The cemetery is located in the eastern end of modern Grobiņa, on the northern side of Ālande River. The cemetery is sometimes also referred to as "Pastorats" as it was close to the former vicarage of Grobiņa. Already in 1839 several of the mounds were examined by Friedrich Kruse, one of the early archaeologists in Latvia. He did however find nothing at all during his excavations (Šturms 1949, 207). In 1929 and 1930, Swedish archaeologist Professor Birger Nerman together with Latvian scholar Francis Balodis excavated 27 barrows here. The barrows were 3-15 meters in diameter, and ranged between 0, 1 and 1, 4 meters in height. All graves examined were cremations. Based on the style of burial, and since many of the graves contained weapons, Nerman assumed that this was the cemetery of warriors from the area of Lake Mälaren in Sweden. It should be mentioned, however that only very few objects could be tied directly to the Svear, as even Nerman states that the weapons found can only be said to be of general Scandinavian origin. A survey of the cemetery was also carried out, and the resulting map showed 480 mounds. As much of the cemetery had been destroyed already then, it was assumed that the cemetery had originally been much larger (Nerman 1958, 1 pp, 176 ; Petrenko, Urtāns 1995, 8 pp.).

In 1942 another two barrows were excavated by archaeologist Eduards Šturms. The next mayor excavations were carried out in 1951. Archaeologist Pēteris Stepiņš excavated another 30 barrows and revised the map of the cemetery from 1930, as several new barrows were discovered, and some shown on the map could not be located after the war. Stepiņš also wrote in his report that many of the barrows had been plundered since 1930 (Stepiņš 1951). In 1959 archaeologist Jolanta Daiga excavated another 30 barrows. However, neither her nor Pēteris Stepiņš's results have been published. From 1984 to 1988 more than 35 barrows were excavated fully or partially within the Courland Project. A large number of previously unknown barrows were discovered, and it is now assumed that the cemetery originally contained at least 2000 barrows. Also, a Gotlandic picture stone was discovered during the project in 1987. Swedish archaeologist Anders Carlsson has made a typological analysis of the objects in the graves excavated by Nerman and Balodis, coming to the conclusion that most of the objects originated between 650 and 700 AD (Carlsson 1983, 39; Nerman 1958, 1 pp ; Petrenko, Urtāns 1995, 8 pp.).

### Porāni cemetery

Porāni (sometimes spelled Purāni) is located approximately 1.5 kilometres north of Grobiņa. The cemetery is similar to Priediens barrow cemetery, but much smaller. In 1930, about 50 barrows were recorded on Nermans maps, but there may originally have been more. Much of the cemetery was damaged during Second World War. Nerman excavated six barrows at Porāni, the grave goods were similar to the ones discovered in Priediens barrow cemetery. One of the excavated barrows contained

an inhumation, the others were cremations. As inhumations traditionally are not connected with the Scandinavian burials in Grobiņa, this is a very interesting discovery (Birger Nerman, unpublished documents; Petrenko, Urtāns 1995, 12).

#### Rudzukalni (Smukumi) cemetery no. 1

Rudzukalni no. 1 was the other big cemetery excavated in 1929 and 1930. Several stray finds had been discovered there, and in 1929 a small excavation was carried out by Francis Balodis and Eduards Šturms who discovered two or three cremations. The excavations were resumed by Birger Nerman the following year, and 102 cremations were discovered. Nerman estimated that the cemetery had originally contained at least 1000 burials, but as much of the cemetery had been destroyed by the extraction of gravel, the numbers are uncertain.

Based on the finds and burial traditions, Nerman came to the conclusion that Rudzukalni no. 1 had been a cemetery used by settlers originating on Gotland. This theory he supported with a story in the medieval Guta Saga, in which every third inhabitant on Gotland had to leave the island because of overpopulation (Gutasagan 2000, 5). One more cremation was discovered by accident in 1962 by V.Ēvaldsons and excavated by Pēteris Stepiņš the same year. In 1987, excavations were again carried out, by archaeologist Valerij Petrenko within the frames of the Courland Project. Two more cremations were discovered.

The cremation graves consists of filled-in round pits, 0,35-1,25 meter in diameter and 0,2-0,5 meter deep. Burnt bone, ash, coal and grave goods were found within the fill. In some of the graves, the human bone had been collected after cremation, and gathered in a clay pot, together with unburned grave goods. There are indications that the bone in other graves had been gathered in a piece of cloth or vessel of birch-bark, but none of these organic containers have been preserved. The grave goods included brooches, swords, spear points, finger rings, shields, bone combs, keys, necklaces and neck rings. Some of the grave goods in question were Gotlandic in character, including circular disc brooches and keys while other grave goods can only be said to be of general Scandinavian origin. Some of the weapons found in the graves had been intentionally broken. Swedish archaeologist Anders Carlsson has made a typological analysis of the objects in the graves excavated by Nerman and Balodis, coming to the conclusion that most of the objects originated between 650 and 750 AD (Carlsson 1983, 39; Nerman 1958, 4 pp ; Petrenko, Urtāns 1995, 12p).

#### *3.2.2 Couronian cemeteries in Grobiņa:*

##### Kapsēde Medze

Located six kilometres north of Grobiņa. Kapsēde Medze was the only cemetery known in the area before the excavations in 1929-30. The cemetery has been dated to the first centuries AD. Two turtle-brooches similar to those found on Öland have been discovered here, but otherwise only Couronian objects have been found here.

The cemetery is therefore considered Couronian and not Scandinavian. (Nerman 1958, 186 Petrenko, Urtāns 1995, 5).

#### Priediens flat cemetery

In 1969 a flat cemetery was discovered north-east of the Priediens barrow cemetery. It was excavated by archaeologist Pēteris Stepiņš, who discovered 18 inhumations and one cremation within an area of 200 m<sup>2</sup>. Based on the grave goods and style of burials, Stepiņš came to the conclusion that the cemetery was Couronian, and dated from the 5-6<sup>th</sup> centuries AD. During the excavations by scholar Ingrida Virse in the 1980:s, another eight inhumations and six cremations were discovered. The grave goods in the cremation graves were badly preserved, but some of them could be dated to around the 11<sup>th</sup> century AD.

Archaeologists Valerij Petrenko and Juris Urtāns have interpreted the different dating and styles of burial and connected it with their location in the landscape. The inhumation graves are the oldest, and were located furthest away from the barrows which they probably predate. The oldest cremations were located among the inhumation graves, and the cremations have then gradually filled up the area between the flat grave inhumations and the barrows (Petrenko, Urtāns 1995, 5p).

#### Atkalni cemetery

The flat cemetery of Atkalni was discovered in 1988. Located southeast of Grobiņa, here within an area of 44 m<sup>2</sup> have graves dating from 5-13<sup>th</sup> century been found. At the same site, a burial dated approximately to Stone Age has been discovered. The majority of the burials discovered were cremations, with most of the grave goods dated to the centuries around 1000 AD and classified as belonging to the Couronian culture. However, only one cremation (or possibly symbolic burial, as no bones were discovered) has been investigated completely (Petrenko, Urtāns 1995, 6pp).

#### Rudzukalni cemetery no. 2

In 1989 Archaeologist Valerij Petrenko discovered two inhumations dated to the 7<sup>th</sup>-9<sup>th</sup> centuries close to the flat cemetery of Rudzukalni (Smukumi) no.1 that was previously known. As artefacts predating the Rudzukalni cemetery no. 1 were discovered, Petrenko assumed that a previously unknown flat cemetery once existed there (Petrenko, Urtāns 1995, 8).

#### *3.2.3 Other assumed Scandinavian cemeteries in the area:*

##### Jači

Jači is a barrow cemetery of similar size as Porāni, located about ten kilometres from Grobiņa. Two barrows were investigated in 1936 by Eduards Šturms. The results are

interesting, as Šturms in one of the barrows discovered an inhumation grave, and in the other a cremation. The grave goods in both graves consisted of brooches common both on Gotland and the Swedish mainland between 6<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> century AD. One of the burials at Jāči cemetery has in more recent years been tested by radiocarbon analysis, and gave a result for about 870 AD (Nerman 1958, 186 Petrenko, Urtāns 1995, 12; Stašulāne 1998, 55).

### Gavieze

This possible cemetery found east of Lake Liepāja is of the same character as Rudzukalni no. 1, but much smaller (Petrenko, Urtāns 1995, 13). A pearl necklace was found here in 1949 as a stray find. The place was investigated by archaeologist Eduards Šturms in the same year. He concluded that it could be a flat cemetery; „Dass es sich um ein Flachgräberfeld handeln könnte”. (Šturms 1949, 209)

### Saslauki, Durbe

This cemetery is located 13 kilometres northeast of Grobiņa, partially on the modern cemetery of the village of Durbe. The cemetery has never been investigated by professional archaeologists, but several stray finds have appeared during grave diggings on the modern cemetery. Among these are a sword, and a circular disc brooch. The later is a form unique to Gotland, and this is one of the brooches included in my material analysis in this thesis (Nerman 1958, 183).

## **4. Other archaeological monuments**

### **4.1 The picture stone**

During an excavation in the “Courland Project” at the Prediens cemetery in 1987, a stone stele of a type almost only known from Gotland was discovered. Only 3 more Gotlandic picture stones have so far been found outside Gotland, and do so clearly indicate a strong connection between Gotland and Grobiņa. The other stones have been discovered on Öland and in Uppland. None of them are of this early dating, or were decorated with Gotlandic motifs (Nylén & Lamm 2003, 144 pp). The picture stone in Grobiņa is 70, 5 cm high, and covered in engravings on one side. As the stone was quite weathered, the exact motif has been the subject of some debate. Valerij Petrenko, who discovered the picture stone, interpreted the motif as a sailing ship. While ships are indeed a common motif on these steles, Jan-Peder Lamm who has done much work on the subject of Gotlandic picture stones has suggested that the image depicts two ducks or other large birds, standing beak-to-beak. This motif is also known from other Gotlandic stones. This he based on a rubbing made of the stone, which quite convincingly shows two ducks. The motif does however not affect

the dating of the stone, which places it in the 6<sup>th</sup>- 7<sup>th</sup> century AD, contemporary with the beginning of the Scandinavian settlement in Grobiņa (Lamm 1991, 9-10; Nylén & Lamm 2003, 171; Petrenko 1991, 1-7).

## **5. The settlement**

### **5.1 Background to the migration**

The 7<sup>th</sup> century is a period of movement of people in the whole of Europe, not only in the Baltic Sea area. It is interesting, that in the end of the 6<sup>th</sup> century on Gotland, a certain abandonment of farms can be seen on Gotland that has been interpreted as the result of a reduction of the population, possibly by a migration. The theory of a large scale migration has later been much criticized, but apparently at least some people from Gotland did move east to Grobiņa at approximately this time (Carlsson 1979, 163, Gutasagan, 2000). According to Nerman, the area east of Lake Liepāja was quite sparsely populated before the establishment of the settlement, but more recent excavations have concluded that the area around Grobiņa was not more or less populated than other areas in Courland at the time. The local people, the Couronians already had an established society in the area when the Scandinavian settlers appeared, and the continuous use of the Atkalni cemetery suggests that at least some of the local Couronians continued to live in the area even after the establishment of the settlement (Petrenko, Urtāns 1995, 6). As for the people from the Lake Mälaren area, the reasons for emigration have been explained with strife between families, as were mentioned in the Icelandic sagas or for political reasons. Another possible reason suggested was the Svear wishing to increase their control over the Baltic Sea trade. Nerman's theories of a one-way stream of influence from west to east over the Baltic Sea have recently been criticized by Swedish archaeologist Lena Thunmark-Nylén. She argues that the discoveries in Grobiņa were interpreted from an explicitly Middle-Swedish point of view, putting the Svear in the central position. The role of the local Couronians in the establishment of the settlement is also usually not discussed (Stašulāne 1998, 51; Thunmark-Nylén 1990, 49pp).

### **5.2 Grobiņa-Seeburg?**

Based on his excavations together with Francis Balodis, Nerman identified the settlement in Grobiņa with the city of Seeburg, mentioned as a city of the couronians in the chronicles of Vita Ansgarii. To state whether Grobiņa and Seeburg are the same is not really the point of this thesis, and the question will only be addressed briefly here. The identification of Grobiņa as the city of Seeburg as well as much other information of Scandinavia and the Baltics at this time originates in the chronicle of Vita Ansgarii written in the 9<sup>th</sup> century by Archbishop Rimbert of Bremen and Hamburg. Vita Ansgarii states that the couronians had been subjected to the Svear from the Lake Mälaren area, but that they had recently rebelled. After repulsing an attempt from the Danes to conquer their lands, the couronians were attacked by

king Olof of the Svear, wishing to re-conquer Couronia. After managing a surprise attack and following looting and burning of a place named Seeburg in the chronicle; that Nerman identified as Grobiņa, king Olofs fleet attacked Apulia. After some time of battle and the Svear temporarily converting to Christianity (the main point of the story as Rimbert intended it), king Olof and the leaders of the couronians had a parley, ending with the couronians surrendering and agreeing to pay tribute to king Olof. According to interpretation of the chronicle, these events took place in 854 or 855. During Balodis and Nermans excavations in Grobiņa, an excavation was also made in Apoule in Lithuania, which was interpreted as identical to Apulia from the chronicle. Over seventy arrowheads of Scandinavian origin were discovered there, possibly giving credit to the accounts of Vita Ansgarii. As with most written sources, the accounts in Vita Ansgarii should be analyzed cautiously, as it was written firstly to commemorate the achievements of an apostle, and only secondly as a historical account, but it does have the advantage of being written only a few decades after the events it retells. Against it in this case speaks the obvious exaggeration of numbers, as no Couronian leader at this time could possibly have had a standing army of 7000 warriors, as the chronicle states were garrisoned in Seeburg. Nor could the hill fort in Apoule, or any other hill fort in Couronia for that matter, have housed 15 000 warriors even if a leader would have had them at his disposal. As the story probably came to the ears of Rimbert through the Svear involved in the raid, they probably exaggerated the size of the enemy to make their victory sound more impressive (Rimbert 1986, 58 pp Stašulāne 2008, 18,138). Apoule is located approximately 40 kilometers from Grobiņa, thus making it possible to march between them during five days as stated in the chronicle (Rimbert 1986, 86). Apart from that, there is not really any evidence neither supporting nor disproving the theory. If we choose to believe the story as retold by Rimbert, then of the settlements currently known Grobiņa is the most likely to be Seeburg.

### **5.3 The Settlement at Grobiņa**

Nerman originally suggested that the founding of Grobiņa had been launched as a military campaign by the Svear from the Lake Mälaren area, and that the settlement in Grobiņa had been a military base. This has been disproved by more recent excavations, though. He also estimated the existence of the settlement to the years 650-800 AD, based on the finds and on Rimberts account in Vita Ansgarii. More recent analyses indicate that some of the burials in one of the Scandinavian cemeteries are later. One of the burials at Jāči cemetery was tested by radiocarbon analysis, and gave a result for about 870 AD, pushing the end of the settlement seventy years forward (Nerman 1930a; Petrenko, Urtāns 1995, 18; Stašulāne 1998, 55).

The settlement itself, has however been examined to a much lesser degree than the cemeteries, though the location is quite well known. An area of culture layers, 0,4-0,6 meter thick has been discovered on both sides of the river Ālande. Layers like this



are characteristic for early Northern European towns. In 2009 and 2010, new examinations of the area revealed that the culture layer covers an area of 20 about ha. This layer corresponds with the modern town of Grobiņa, beginning at the Priediens cemetery and ending at the western end of the town. However, most of this area is today occupied by buildings and gardens. Therefore it is quite disturbed, and only in a few small areas is the culture layer believed to be relatively intact. Also, it is as of yet unknown if the culture layer in the whole area is contemporary. Various stray finds has been recovered from the culture layer; including iron slag, clay crucible fragments and evidence of other crafts (Ingrida Virse, e-mail 2012; Petrenko, Urtāns 1995, 14, 15).

#### **5.4 The Hill fort in Grobiņa**

Grobiņa hill fort, sometimes also referred to as Skabārža kalns (Hornbeam Hill), is situated in the modern city of Grobiņa, on a small peninsula on the northern side of the river Ālande. The plateau of the peninsula is levelled, forming a platform 80 meter long and about 40-45 meter wide. On the eastern side, a 30 meter long and 2 meter high rampart built. Nerman and Balodis made a small-scale trial excavation here in 1929-1930. During the excavation, a 1, 2 meter thick culture layer was discovered. Several artefacts from the period between the 9<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> century were discovered, and the archaeologists came to the conclusion that the hill fort is younger than the Scandinavian settlement, or appearing in the very end of its existence (Nerman 1930a; Urtans, J. 1998, 47). However, in 2010 a georadar analysis was carried out on the Gobina hill fort as part of an investigation in cooperation between Latvian National history Museum and the Archaeological Museum of Schleswig-Holstein. The results indicated that the culture layer was thicker than previously thought, at least up to 2 meters. Also, the C14 analysis of a drilling core from the hill fort gave a result of possibly 5<sup>th</sup> or 6<sup>th</sup> century. This indicated that the fort could be older than previously believed, and thus possibly contemporary or even older than the settlement. (Ingrida Virse, e-mail 2012).

#### **5.5 Outside the main settlement**

Although Grobiņa represents an early urban centre, many of the newcomers also settled as farmers in the countryside, far from rivers and roads. This way of life would also be the one the settlers from Gotland were used to from home, as the countryside of Gotland has for the most part of history consisted of isolated farmsteads (Carlsson 1979, 39; Petrenko, Urtāns 1995, 18; Thunmark-Nylén 1990, 51). The Scandinavian colonization and settling seems to have been concentrated to this quite small area in western Latvia, as only a very few Scandinavian artefacts from this period have been discovered outside the area in or close to Grobiņa.

## **Discussion part:**

## 6. Comparing Grobiņa with centres of trade and crafts

The following settlements are only a sample of the settlements discovered around the Baltic Sea. The limited space of this thesis does not allow all the known settlements to be discussed here.

### 6.1 Settlements for comparison

*Wiskiauten* is another site of possible Scandinavian settlement, contemporary or slightly later than Grobiņa. This site is located close to modern Kaliningrad, in the village of Mokhovoe. Both cremation and inhumation graves have been discovered at the cemetery here. Jewellery typical for both Gotland and other regions in Scandinavia, such as Denmark and Lake Mälaren area was discovered here. The Scandinavian tradition of deliberate destruction of the weapons was also observed in some of the graves. However, the character of the site is still uncertain, though several archaeologists have expressed their opinions about it over the years. Among the ideas can be mentioned trade center and garrison, the latter by Birger Nerman in 1936. The exact location of the Wiskiauten settlement is uncertain, but it appears as if it was located in a wet meadow area. Archaeologist Fjodor Androshchuk also points out that another site where Scandinavian objects have been discovered was located in a similar terrain. The site in question is Janow Pomorski (Androshchuk 2008, 517 pp).

*Birka* is probably the most well known early urban center around the Baltic Sea, and also one of the most excavated. The settlement was founded on an island in Lake Mälaren in late 8<sup>th</sup> century, and stretched over an area of 5-6 ha. Birka was protected by a rampart, and by an underwater palisade, and in the late stages of the settlement by a fort. However, it appears like the rampart was added only in the 10<sup>th</sup> century. Cemeteries with together a total of about 2000 barrows have been discovered, as well as extensive flat cemeteries. Of the pottery discovered at the site, about 75-80% was local ware. The trade centre decreased in importance in the end of the 10<sup>th</sup> century, with the rise of nearby Sigtuna (Ambrosiani 2008, 94pp; Gustin 2004, 194).

*Fröjel/Ridanäs* is located on the west coast of Gotland, about 30 kilometers south of Visby. An area with increased levels of phosphates indicating human activity covered about 6-5 ha. It has been interpreted as a center of trade and crafts as well as one of Gotland's largest ports at the time. The main activities of the site have been dated from 6<sup>th</sup> to the end of 12<sup>th</sup> century, and more modest activities at the port continuing until 17<sup>th</sup> century. The site has been extensively excavated, resulting in finds connected to crafts and an intensive foreign trade, including several scales and remains from making of combs. Several cemeteries have also been located, with both cremations and inhumations. DNA analysis of the burials in the oldest cemetery gave interesting results, as about 40 percent of the male population seems to have come from the Baltic's or possibly Russia. The grave goods was however typical for natives of Gotland (Carlsson 1999, 53, 78 pp; Carlsson 2008, 131).

*Wolin* was located some distance from the sea on the island by the same name between the rivers Oder and Dzvina in modern Poland. The settlement was located on a long, raised beach ridge between the river Dzvina and an area of marshy ground that separates it from the main island. The area of settlement covered about 20 ha and was protected by a rampart. The settlement had several cemeteries, located some distance away. *Wolin* was a trade and crafts centre of importance between the 8<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> century, tools from several different crafts have been discovered on the site. The pottery discovered is almost exclusively local ware (Clarke & Ambrosiani 1991, 112 pp).

*Staraja Ladoga* is located at a riverside, a few kilometers from Lake Ladoga, Russia. Scandinavian presence at the site can be dated back to the early 7<sup>th</sup> century, but increases in the late 8<sup>th</sup> and early 9<sup>th</sup> century. The site has a fort, and several outlying cemeteries. Several of the cemeteries are of Scandinavian barrow type, but local Slavic cemeteries with also occur. The latter are called *Sopki*, and consists of high, steep barrows with multiple burials in each. At the settlement site, possible evidence of metalworking, jewellery production and several other crafts has been discovered. Also, objects of Scandinavian origin have been discovered on the site. There are both objects connected with male and female environments, suggesting that entire Scandinavian families were present in *Staraja Ladoga* as well. These objects are quite numerous in the earlier stages of the settlement, but become rarer after 10<sup>th</sup> century. Objects of local origin dominate in these later phases, and it has been interpreted as if the Scandinavians were assimilated into the local population. The area of settlement covers about 10 ha (Androshchuk 2008, 520 Clarke & Ambrosiani 1991, 119pp).

## **6.2 Comparing Grobiņa to known contemporary centers of trade and crafts**

Around the 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> centuries AD, many new settlements with the characters of trade and crafts centres appeared around the Baltic Sea. Differences and similarities between Grobiņa and several of the contemporary settlements will here be discussed. Many similarities between the settlements can be noticed, indicating that the settlements have had similar functions. What all these settlements have in common is a relatively high population density, noticeable in the cemeteries and by the extensive culture layers. The settlements are also located in similar terrain, a small distance from the coast along a river, or in the case of *Wolin* and *Birka*; on an island. The size of these settlements does however differ. As was recently discovered, the size of the settlement in Grobiņa was of considerable size, about 20 hectares. If the culture layer there is more or less contemporary, this was a centre easily dwarfing *Birka*, *Staraja Ladoga* and *Fröjel* in size (Ingrida Virse, email 2012). *Wolin* was of similar size as Grobiņa while the size of *Wiskiauten* is yet unknown. Archaeological evidence of different crafts, including slag and tools has also been discovered on all the sites (Clarke & Ambrosiani 1991: 112, 119pp).

In Birka and Wolin, defensive ramparts were discovered. As recent discoveries have indicated, the hill fort in Grobiņa might be contemporary with the settlement and thus have served a similar defensive purpose (Ambrosiani 2008, 94pp; Clarke & Ambrosiani 1991, 112 pp; Ingrida Virse, e-mail 2012).

Regarding everyday objects discovered at the settlements, almost all pottery discovered both in Grobin, Birka and Wolin have been locally produced; only a few were imported. The imported ware may in at least some of the cases have been used for transport of other goods rather than being meant as trade goods themselves (Clarke & Ambrosiani 1991, 112 pp; Gustin 2004, 194; Stašulāne 2008, 55).

Another feature observed at all these settlements are the extensive cemeteries, as a result of the high population density. Also, in the area of Staraja Ladoga, the same kind of smaller outlying cemeteries as in Grobiņa have been discovered. Perhaps even more interesting, the objects discovered in these graves appear to be Scandinavian in origin. As archaeologist Fjodor Androshchuk has concluded, apparently Scandinavians in the east settled both in the early urban centers and on farms in the countryside (Androshchuk 2008, 535). Regarding the more urban cemeteries in Staraja Ladoga, the same pattern as in Grobiņa can be observed, with both Scandinavian cemeteries and the graves typical for the local population. In the case of Staraja Ladoga the so called Sopki; high, steep barrows with multiple burials (Clarke & Ambrosiani 1991, 119pp). The same ideas of a gradual assimilation of the Scandinavian settlers in Grobiņa has also been applied to the situation in Staraja Ladoga, with the Scandinavian influence most notable in the early stages of the settlement's history (Androshchuk 2008, 520).

## **7. The Settlement of Grobiņa**

### **7.1 The settlement in the light of recent discoveries**

The investigations of the settlement site and hill fort during 2009 and 2010 came out with several interesting discoveries. The project was organized in cooperation between the Latvian National history Museum and the Archaeological Museum of Schleswig-Holstein. The person responsible for the archaeological investigations was Latvian archaeologist Ingrida Virse. These investigations included the use of geoscanning and georadar as well as taking samples by drilling cores. First of all, the full extent of the culture layer was finally recognized to be about 20 hectares. If all the area has been used at the same time is however yet not known. The layer is between 0.4 and 0.6 meter thick (Ingrida Virse, e-mail 2012).

The discoveries at the hill fort were even more interesting. The culture layers were found to be much thicker than previously thought; at least 2 meters as compared to the previously thought 1.2 meters. In one place the culture layer was measured to 4 meters, but as Virse suggested it might have been a filled-up well. Drilling for earth cores also were carried out at the hill fort. In one of the cores organic material was

discovered at a depth of 1.8 meters. The material was dated to the middle of the 5<sup>th</sup> century by radiocarbon dating. Unfortunately, no more datable organic material was found at the site to confirm the dating. However, the dating together with the thicker culture layers indicates a higher age of the hill fort than was previously believed (Ingrida Virse, e-mail 2012). If the material dated indeed can be tied to the hill fort, it would thus possibly make the hill fort older than the settlement as opposed as to have been assumed before (Ingrida Virse, e-mail 2012). This of course would change the interpretation of the site considerably; the Scandinavians settling at the foot of a Couronian hill fort. The question of which group actually initiated the creation of the trade centre on the eastern Baltic Sea coast is thus even more open than before. As Gustin has pointed out, there is also possible evidence of even other groups present in Grobiņa, in particular individuals from Denmark, Öland of Åland. Certain fibulae frequently discovered in these regions are also present in Grobiņa. Thus, Grobiņa can, quite certainly be interpreted as a centre of trade (Gustin 2004, 61-62).

## **7.2 The end of the settlement**

Regarding the end of the settlement, there is conflicting evidence. On the one hand, Nerman discovered over 70 Scandinavian arrowheads at nearby Apoule, possibly supporting the theory of the end in a military conflict, as it was mentioned in Vita Ansgarii (Stašulāne 1998, 108). On the other hand, objects with mixed Scandinavian and Couronian features, and the fact that Scandinavian farmers could settle relatively far from each other, apparently not relying very much on each other for protection shows of a mostly peaceful co-existence. Also, settlements destroyed during military conflicts are usually rebuilt again, if the inhabitants survived or new settled by others (Graham-Campbell & Valor 2007, 150-151; Petrenko, Urtāns 1995, 18). Also, objects have been discovered from the period between the youngest grave investigated and the first mention of the village Grobiņa in 1253. There are strong indications of a continuity of the settlement into the modern city of Grobiņa, and thus the settlement can hardly be said to have ended at all. As for Grobiņa as a trade center, the fate of many of the early trade centers were sealed when the trade routes changed. While some settlements survived, the centers of commerce in the regions were relocated to other places (Graham-Campbell, Valor 2007, 149-151, 306).

The frequent contacts between Gotland and this part of Latvia did however apparently continue. In 1229, pope Gregory IX wrote a letter forbidding the people of Gotland to sell weapons to the “heathen” peoples of Couronia. Apparently this ban had limited effect, as pope Urban IV sent a similar letter about 30 years later (Birger Nerman, unpublished material).

Nowadays, most archaeologists are convinced that the Scandinavians were assimilated and blended into the general Couronian population after a few generations. A find of a Couronian wrist bracelet with Scandinavian decorations and other objects displaying mixed Scandinavian and local features strengthen the theory of mixing of cultures, and eventually assimilation. There is nothing pointing to an

abandonment of the settlement in this theory, but rather continuity between the Vendel age settlement and the modern city of Grobiņa. (Petrenko, Urtāns 1995, 18,19). This theory is also supported by the results from the analysis of the circular disc brooches in this thesis, as well as by the analysis by Anders Carlsson which clearly shows that the majority of the Scandinavian objects are from the period 650-750 AD (Carlsson 1983, 39).

Some other mixing of cultural elements can also be observed in the cemeteries in Grobiņa. The presence of inhumations at the Porani and Jači cemeteries, as well as the Gotlandic picture stone on the Priediens barrow cemetery speaks of cross culture influence. But on the other hand, the use of separate contemporary cemeteries with different burial traditions could indicate a society where the different groups were separated by death, even if they probably frequently interacted in life. The discoveries from the DNA analysis of the cemetery in Fröjel further highlight how difficult interpretations of matters on ethnicity and group are (Birger Nerman, unpublished material; Carlsson 2008, 131; Petrenko, Urtāns 1995, 8, 12).

## **8. Analysis**

### **8.1 Presentation of the material (circular disc brooches)**

The background for this analysis is a theory proposed by the Swedish archaeologist Lena Thunmark-Nylén. According to this theory, the material evidence indicates that all the families moving to the Grobiņa settlement from Gotland arrived during quite a short time in Vendel age. The settlement has then never been refilled by new arriving families from Gotland, and has gradually been assimilated into the surrounding Couronian culture. What points toward this are the mixed cultural elements discovered in the graves, and that traditional Gotlandic brooches are very worn out, and have been used in other ways than they were originally intended to (Thunmark-Nylén 1983b, 315 pp). Thus, the analysis in this thesis will study whether or not most of the circular disc brooches discovered in and around Grobiņa are from approximately the same time period. The materials included in this study are the six circular disk brooches discovered in Grobiņa, one from the immediately surrounding area and one found under unknown circumstances. For a detailed overview of the individual brooches in the study, see appendix I. These brooches are very typical for Gotland during this period, and have only rarely been discovered outside the island (Nerman 1958, 188 pp). Of the brooches in the study, the brooches nr 1 to 5 were discovered during Nerman's excavation of Rudzukalni (Smukumi) cemetery no.1 (Nerman 1958). Brooch nr 6 was discovered as a stray find during gravel extraction at the same cemetery ca 1935 (Šturms 1949), brooch nr 8 was discovered as a stray find on the modern cemetery in Sauslauks, Durben about 13 km northeast from Grobiņa (Nerman 1958, 183). The circumstances of discovery of brooch nr 7 are unknown to me; possibly it is a stray find (appendix I).

## 8.2 Analysis of the brooches

The method of dating circular disk brooches used in this thesis is the one established by Danish archaeologist Karen Høilund Nielsen. In this method, the chronology was based on correspondence analysis against other material, and how these appeared together as grave goods. A typology was then based on the different elements on the brooches, and it could be observed that the size of the rim consequently increased over time. The development of the brooches was divided into the phases presented below, which is a slightly altered version of the chronology established by Birger Nerman. The dating is not exact by this method, but gives a good indication of the age of the brooches (Høilund Nielsen 1999: 167, 189).

VIIA: 550-600 AD: 2-7 mm rim, type I2

VIIIB: 600-700 AD: 8-10 mm rim, type I3

VIIIC: 700-750 AD: 11-15 mm rim, type I4

VIIID: 750-800 AD: 16-17 mm rim, type I5

The old methods of dating circular disc brooches, established by Birger Nerman, is to study the decoration on the front of the brooch (Nerman 1975). This old typology has been criticized for having an “*impressionistic methodology and sub-standard source criticism*”(Rundkvist 2003: 60).

## 9. Conclusions

### 9.1 Results from the analysis of brooches

Of the brooches analysed, brooches nr 1, 2, 4 and 7 had a rim 10 mm wide. Brooch nr 5 had a rim 11 mm wide, while the rim of brooch nr 3 was 15 mm wide and brooch nr 6 had a rim 17 mm wide. As the whereabouts of brooch nr 8 are unknown, it could not be measured. However, as seen in the photo from Nerman 1958 (p. 183) it appears as if the brooch had a rim of approximately 10 mm. A clear pattern can thus be observed, with five or possibly six of the brooches having a rim-size of 10-11 mm, indicating that they were made around 700 AD. The brooches nr 3 and 6 does not fit into the general pattern, as they are likely made towards the end of the 8<sup>th</sup> century AD. As these brooches most likely are younger than the others, apparently some new brooches did arrive from Gotland, and therefore possibly also new families. However, it is interesting that both these youngest brooches come from graves with mixed Couronian and Scandinavian objects. It should however be mentioned that neither brooch 3 or 6 was not discovered by an archaeologist (Nerman 1958, 18; Šturms 1949).

As this is the analysis of only one group of material and only eight objects, only a very small part of the population is actually represented in the analysis of the brooches. It is thus possible that these individuals do not give a good representation

of the population of the settlement as a whole. Also, that the contexts of several of the brooches are unknown must be considered (appendix I). However, the pattern of most of the circular disc brooches originating in the beginning of the settlement is the same as the results of the analysis by Anders Carlsson of the graves excavated by Nerman in 1929 and 1930. The results of his analysis clearly showed that the majority of the Scandinavian objects are from the period 650-750 AD (Carlsson 1983, 39).

My initial hypothesis that all circular disc brooches in Grobiņa would be of similar age was not proven entirely correct. Still, the result indicates that the majority of the circular disc brooches were made around the beginning of the 8<sup>th</sup> century AD. Furthermore, the results from the analysis still support the idea of a gradual assimilation of the Scandinavian settlers into the local population, with the two youngest brooches appearing in graves with mixed Scandinavian and Couronian materials (appendix I).

## **9.2 Interpretations**

The comparison of Grobiņa to settlements interpreted as centres of trade and crafts supports the idea that the settlement in Grobiņa from the 7<sup>th</sup> to the 9<sup>th</sup> century was most likely a trade center. Several common elements between the settlements could be observed, including archaeological evidence of different crafts, defensive structures and a high population density (Clarke & Ambrosiani 1991, 112 pp, 119pp; Gustin 2004, 194; Stašulāne 2008, 55). Particularly striking are the similarities to Staraja Ladoga, with both Scandinavian cemeteries and the graves typical for the local population present in both settlements, as well as the small, rural Scandinavian cemeteries. The same ideas of gradual assimilation of the Scandinavian settlers have also been applied to Staraja Ladoga (Androshchuk 2008, 520, 535). As for whether the settlement in Grobiņa is the same as the town Seeburg in Vita Ansgarii, it is hard to find evidence both to prove and disprove it, and the aim of this paper is not to suggest either.

The results of the analysis of the brooches as well as Anders Carlssons analyses of other grave goods supports the theory that most of the settling families arriving at the same time (Carlsson 1983, 39). However, the two younger brooches indicate that the inhabitants in Grobiņa to some extent did remain in relatively frequent contact with Gotland, whether the brooches arrived as trade goods, gifts or as belongings to newly arriving families to the settlement. The bringing of a picture stone from Gotland to Grobiņa could be interpreted as a manifestation of this wish to retain a link with the old homeland. Still, the generally accepted theory that the Scandinavians were gradually assimilated into the general Couronian population after a few generations seems the most likely. This is also the theory supported by the results of the analysis of the circular disc brooches. As for the relations between the Scandinavian settlers



and the local population, most of the evidence speaks for a relatively peaceful coexistence in life, even if the groups apparently separated in different cemeteries by death. That the settlement lost its role as a trading center when the ships became larger, and no longer easily could travel up the Ålände River is a more likely scenario than it being destroyed in a Viking raid and never recovering. More excavations of the site of settlement could probably give answers to many of these questions. The recent discovery indicating that the hill fort might be older than previously believed opens up for new interpretations of the settlement. As new archaeological investigations are planned in Grobiņa in the following years, hopefully more information on the settlement will emerge (Ingrida Virse, e-mail 2012). As Gustin has pointed out, there are indications on connections with Åland and Denmark (Gustin 2004, 61-62). Future studies might shed light on these possible connections, and whether even other groups might have been present in Grobiņa.

As the final words of this thesis, I would like to state that the settlement of Scandinavians in Grobiņa should not be seen as an isolated event in history, but rather as part of an interaction between groups that began long before and would last after the end of Grobiņa as a trade center.

## 10. Summary

Grobiņa, a small town in the western part of Latvia has been interpreted as the site of a Vendel age Scandinavian settlement, possibly being founded around 650 AD. Several cemeteries where the deceased have been buried according to Scandinavian burial traditions have been excavated. The objects discovered in these graves are both of Gotlandic and local origin, others can just be said to be of general Scandinavian origin. Also a Gotlandic picture stone has been discovered on one of the cemeteries. Other cemeteries with burials in the style of the local Couronian traditions have also been found in the area. The settlement is believed to have been founded in 650 AD, though recent discoveries indicate that it might be older. Several series of excavations have been carried out in Grobiņa. The first were made by Swedish archaeologist Birger Nerman and his Latvian colleague Francis Balodis, while the latest examinations were carried out as recently as 2009 and 2010.

The aim of this thesis is to study the characteristics of the settlement of Grobiņa. To achieve this, I examined in which ways Grobiņa is similar and different from the known centres of trade and crafts, as well as the relations with Gotland and the local population. A comparison to several settlements around the Baltic Sea was thus carried out. The result of the comparison suggested that Grobiņa was a centre of trade and crafts, many similarities could be observed with centres of trade and crafts around the Baltic Sea. In particular the similarities with Staraja Ladoga were quite remarkable. The area of settlement in Grobiņa covered about 20 hectares, as can be observable by the area of 0.4-0.6 m thick culture layer. Most of this area is now within the modern town of Grobiņa. There is also a hill fort, which recent investigations indicate is contemporary with, or older than the rest of the area of settlement.

The early theories on the settlement suggested that it might have been established as a military base by the king of the Svear in Birka, and that the settlers from Gotland would only have arrived later as merchants. It was also suggested that the settlements name would have been Seeburg, based on an account in the chronicle *Vita Ansgarii*. More recent theories have rather expressed the view that Grobiņa was a centre of trade and crafts. This is also the theory supported by the results in this thesis.

A study of the age of circular disc brooches discovered in and around Grobiņa was also carried out. This type of brooch was very typical for Gotlandic women at the time. The results concluded that all these brooches except two were made around 700 AD. This supports the theory that most of the settlers from Gotland arrived at the same time, and were then gradually assimilated into the local Couronian population after a few generations. This is also the theory currently believed by most archaeologists. There are also indications of continuity between the Vendel age settlement and the modern town of Grobiņa.

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### Electronic messages

- Ingrida Virse, archaeologist at Latvijas Nacionālais Vēstures Muzejs (Latvian National Museum of History): by e-mail 2012-03-09 and 2012-03-19

## Appendix I: Brooches

The graves III, X and XI were not excavated by archaeologists, but were collected and recorded in 1929 by the local teacher Mr. Deiders who also alerted the Latvian board of cultural heritage of the discoveries. These graves were recorded by Birger Nerman later the same year (Nerman 1930b, 1).

Brooch nr: 1, ID nr: A7145:23, Grave III, Smukumi cemetery Find nr 34. Latvijas Nacionālais vēstures muzejs. The rim is 10 mm wide and of the plain type. Grave III was discovered in 1929. Among the other grave goods can be mentioned neck rings and arm rings typical for the Couronian archaeological culture as well as keys and bracteates of Gotlandic origin (Nerman 1958, 16).



(Photo from Nerman 1958, taf. 5)

Brooch nr: 2, ID Nr.A7144:1, Grave X, Smukumi cemetery, Find nr 79, Latvijas Nacionālais vēstures muzejs. The rim is 10 mm wide with a chequer pattern. The brooch has a key and a chain attached. Grave X was discovered by accident by the farmer Jānis Anuzs in 1928. A key of Gotlandic origin was also discovered in the grave (Nerman 1958, 18).



*Foto: Alise Šulte*



*Foto: Alise Šulte*

Brooch nr: 3, ID Nr. 7145:17, grave XI, Smukumi Cemetery, Find nr 81, Latvijas Nacionālais vēstures muzejs. The rim is 15 mm wide and decorated in chequer pattern. Grave XI was discovered in 1929. Other grave goods include neck rings and arm rings typical for the Couronian archaeological culture (Nerman 1958, 18).



*Foto: Alise Šulte*



Brooch nr: 4, ID Nr.A7177:4, Grave 35, Smukumi cemetery, Find nr 138, Latvijas Nacionālais vēstures muzejs. The rim is 10 mm wide. The rim is very worn, but it probably was of the plain type. The brooch had a chain attached, but it is not preserved. Grave 35 was excavated by Birger Nerman in 1930. The other grave goods include glass beads, and an animal headed brooch of Gotlandic origin (Nerman 1958, 32).



*Foto: Alise Šulte*

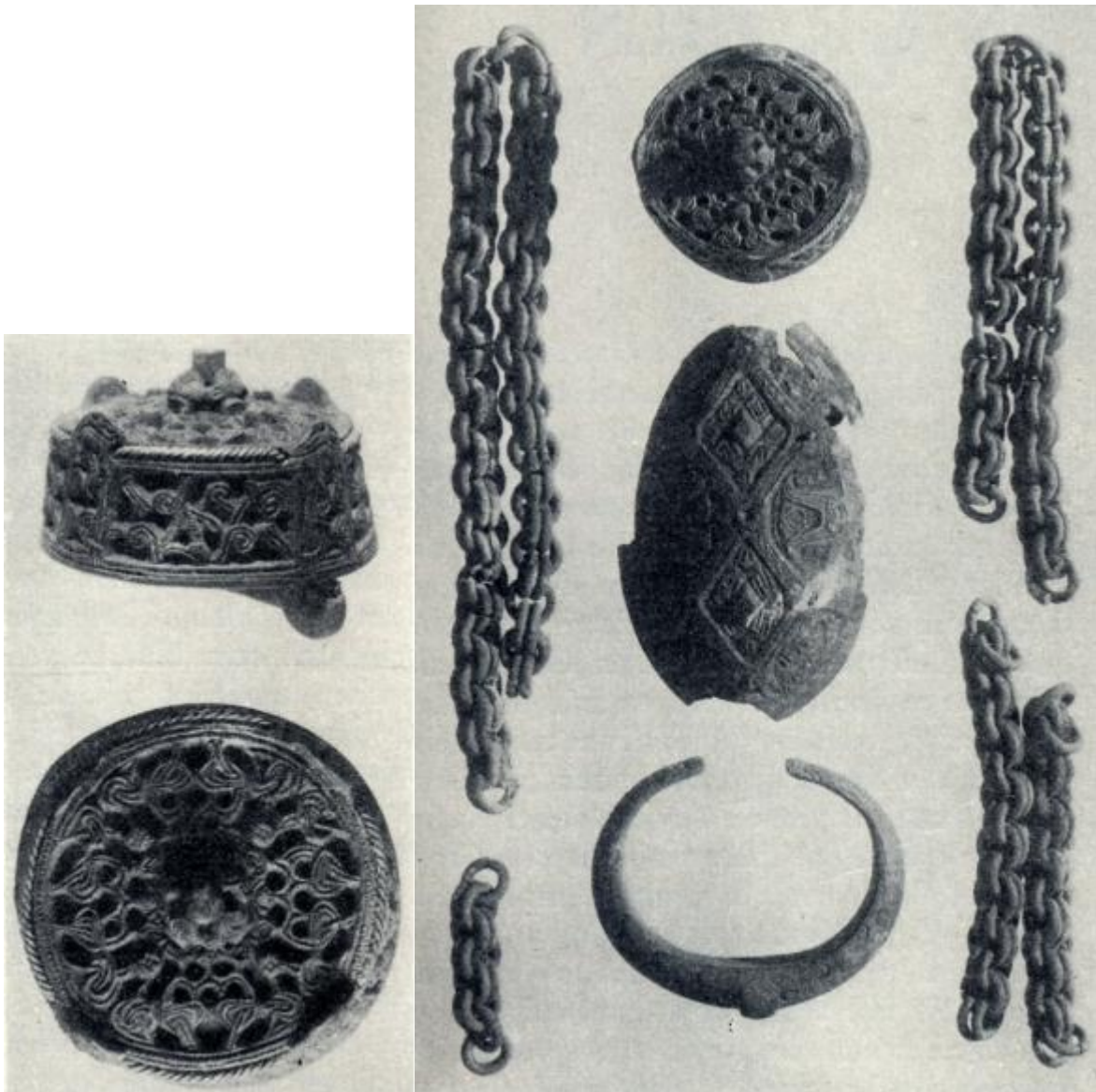
Brooch nr: 5, ID Nr.A12060:11, Grave 45, Smukumi cemetery, Find nr 138, Latvijas Nacionālais vēstures muzejs. The rim is 11 mm wide and of the plain type. Grave 45 was excavated by Birger Nerman in 1930. Other grave goods include a knife, glass beads and fragments of a bone comb (Nerman 1958, 36).



*Foto: Alise Šulte*

Brooch nr: 6, ID Nr. A: 8879-2, Stray find, Smukumi Cemetery, Grobiņas novada Domē (Grobinas Town Hall)

The rim is 17 mm wide and decorated in animal style. Stray find from Smukumi, discovered ca 1935 during gravel extraction. Possibly discovered together with a tortoise brooch, an arm ring and a chain (in picture), but the exact circumstances of the discovery are unknown (Šturms 1945).



(Photos from Nerman 1958, 173)

Brooch nr:7, ID NR: LVMM 5422, no information on discovery, Grobiņas novada Domē (Grobinas Town Hall)

The rim is 10 mm wide and of the plain type. The brooch is in the collections of the museum of Liepāja, but I have not been able to find any information on it in any report. Possibly the brooch is a stray find. The pattern on the front is identical to that of brooch nr 1.

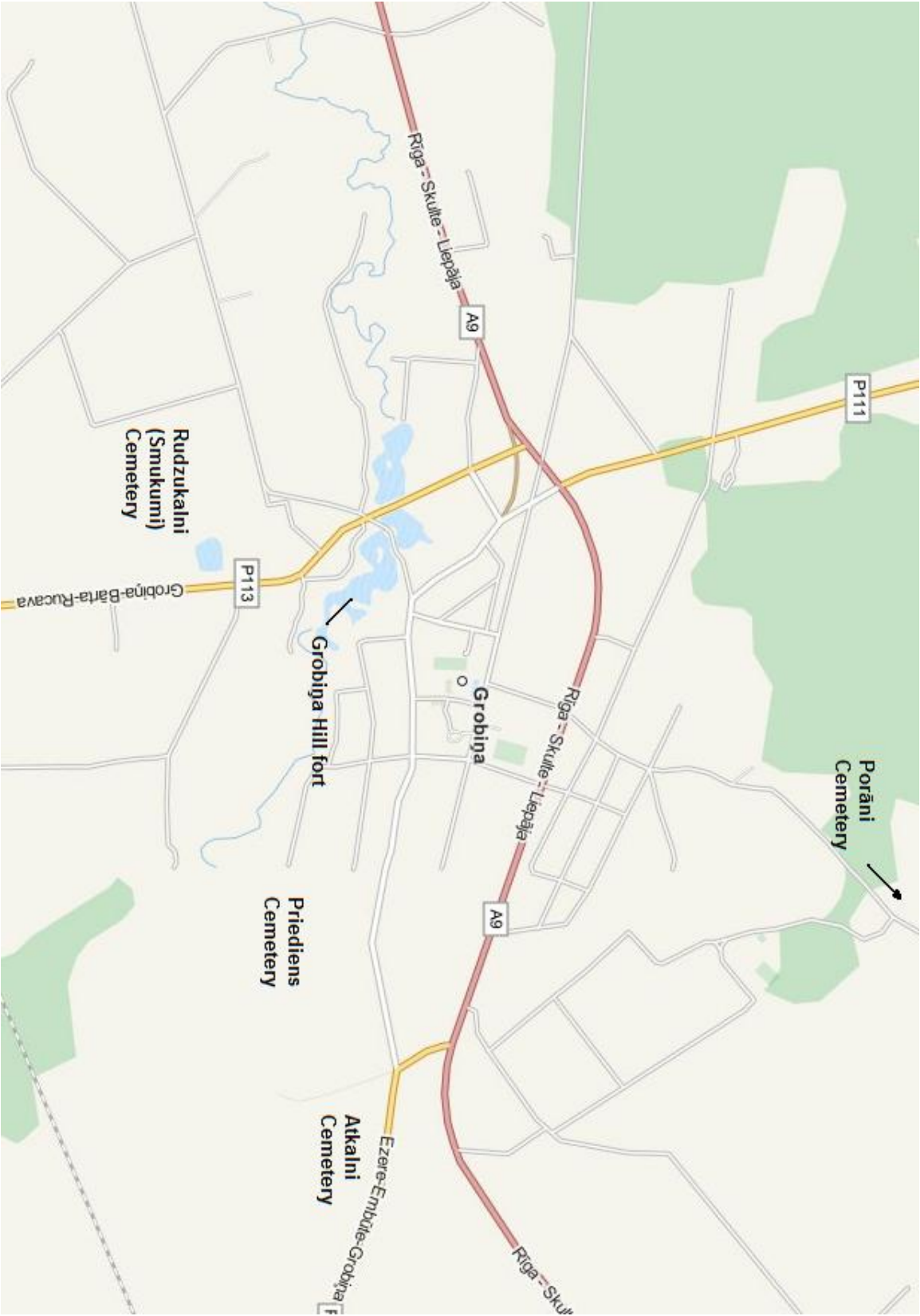
Brooch nr: 8, Stray find, Sauslauks Durben

Discovered at the modern cemetery of Durbe, the modern cemetery overlaps a cemetery dated to Viking age. Date and circumstances of the find are unknown (Nerman 1958, 183). I was not able to find the current whereabouts of the brooch, or any documented measurements of it. Possibly, the brooch disappeared during Second World War. The pattern on the front of brooch is somewhat similar to brooch nr 1 and 4. From the picture the rim appears to be about 10 mm.



(Photo from Nerman 1958, p. 183)

**Appendix II: Map of Grobiņa**



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