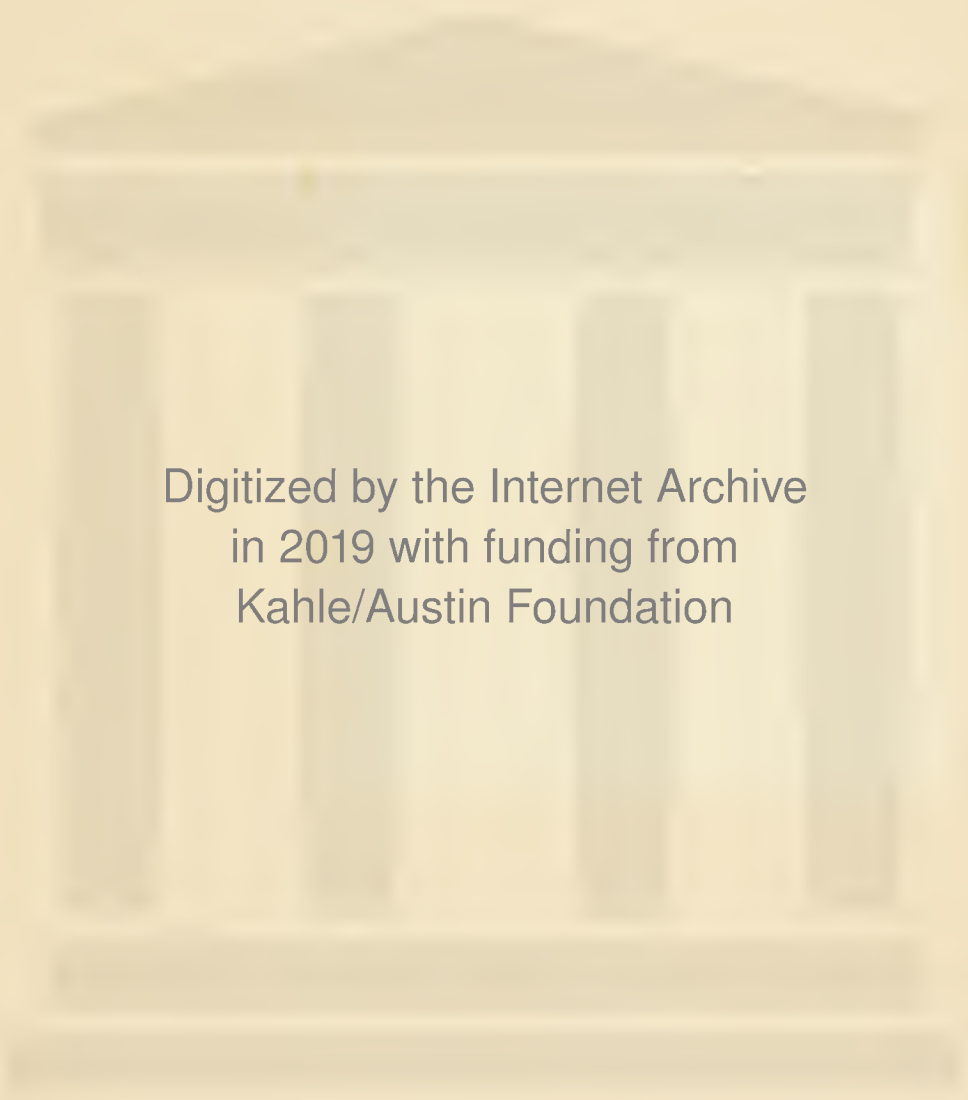


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The Ancient Amber Routes and
the Geographical Discovery
of the Eastern Baltic

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the Geographical Discovery
of the Eastern Baltic

By

Arnolds Spekke

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ONULP

Preface

to the English edition

In addition to the explanations already given to my Latvian readers, it would be useful to point out to the foreign reader in general, and the English reader in particular, that the scope of this booklet is an attempt to give a sketch of the vast and important problem of the amber trade in ancient times—a sketch which is limited in time and in geographical extension.

From the chronological point of view my interests and my possibilities are focused on the first two centuries of our era, *i.e.*, on the period which has been covered by some historical documentation: texts of Greek and Latin authors, as well as some very vague allusions to cartographic data. Those two centuries are the ones which give us an insight into the process by which the flourishing amber trade between the Eastern Baltic and the Adriatic made possible the geographical discovery of these Baltic eastern shores.

From the topographical point of view, I myself, not being a specialist in archaeological field, had only to follow the three routes traced by De Navarro—routes which in those ancient times led to Italy. His third route, the most recent one, which connected the shores of the Aestii in East Prussia (Sambia in Latin, Samland in German) with the most important trade centre in Northeastern Italy, *i.e.*, with Aquileia, the second Rome, as it was called in those days, was naturally to have a special attraction for me. Some attention should also be devoted in passing to the two outer routes, both in the same southerly direction: the Western one to the “amber river” Rhone, and to Massilia (Marseilles); the eastern following the rivers Vistula and Dniester, and leading by way of the Black Sea to the peoples and the empires of the Near East. Both of these routes were of the utmost importance in remote prehistoric times and many of the illustrations quoted in this booklet, together with the scholarly explanations of Dr. V. Ģinters, offer the best evidence to it. But a historical documentation of the Vistula-Dniester route hardly exists, and therefore all possibilities of scientific research lie heavily on the

archaeologist's shoulders. However, as the Latvian archaeologist, professor E. Šturms points it out in his review of my book (Latvia, April 7, 1956), they have not yet advanced far enough in their investigations to offer any synthetic analysis of this problem.

Nor should we fail to emphasize that the chemical and seismographical analyses of the amber stores of Aquileia, and of other museums of Central Europe, have so far not been applied to our problem.

Finally, I must tell the non-Latvian reader that some of my conclusions will differ from those he may have found in other treatises and articles concerning the amber trade during the peak centuries of the Roman Empire. These differences would be quite noticeable to the promoters of this trade on the shores subsequently called East Prussia. To previous historiographers, the Balts in this connection have been either *une quantité négligeable* or simply non-existent, whereas my studies of the respective texts and recently of the archaeological findings of Latvian and foreign students have convinced me that it was precisely the Aestii, in other words, the predecessors of the various tribes of Ancient Prussians, that for several centuries have been the sole and exclusive managers of this trade, *solī omnium*, to quote the words of Tacitus as applied to the Aestii as the gatherers of amber.

The English edition of my booklet differs from the Latvian one in having a few more additions, results of recent researches, especially in Chapters 2 and 4.

Dr. V. Ģinters has once more kindly made an invaluable contribution by developing and increasing the illustrative part of this book.

To my appreciation expressed in the Preface to the Latvian edition, I must add my thanks to Dr. L. Quincy Mumford, Librarian of Congress, for his kind and very helpful advice on how to adapt my book for the English reader, and finally to my daughter, Mrs. M. Fyfe, for the pains she has taken in translating the archaic turns of the Latvian language and her father's involved style.

Washington, Autumn 1956.

A. Sp.

Preface

to the Latvian edition

The aims of this little book are easily defined. The first is the author's wish to look from a Baltic point of view at the ancient amber trade and its connection with the Aestii tribe which is identified with increasing certainty with the Old Prussians or their predecessors. As will be shown, the Baltic approach will not be in vain, for it will open new horizons and throw light on some of the problems of the Eastern Baltic regions.

Another aim is an endeavour to acquaint Latvian readers with the testimonies of old texts, not only by pointing out the bibliography leading to the relevant sources, but also by presenting them to the reader in such a way as to enable him to approach more critically the problems in question and to gain a certain familiarity with the ways of life and thought of ancient times. The need for this is enhanced by the lack (to my knowledge) of any specific, extensive monographs or books about the ancient amber trade, such as exist about the so-called "old silk route" from China to Western Europe. Information about the amber trade must be traced through various books concerning amber generally, and articles in archaeological magazines, and is not at all easy to find.

Concerning the third aim of this book, the most difficult questions will arise in the chapters dealing with the geographical emergence of the east coast of the Baltic from prehistoric obscurity, and its centuries-old struggle with the mists of geographic legends. The author has tried, as far as possible, to avoid a detailed analysis of these aspects, emphasizing only the most important and obvious ones. But all of these things have been demanding to be written, because one of the most marked peculiarities of Baltic history is its search for depths—from the chronological as well as the human angle.

But before reaching those few windows overgrown with the centuries-old tradition of alien peoples which open up interesting vistas

into ancient Baltic history, one must follow long and tortuous ways through the world's historiography.

To a certain extent this can also be said about the present booklet which tries to grope for paths trodden by long bygone generations. I can truly say that one of the inducements to write this booklet came to me just from reading Sir Mortimer Wheeler's inspiring book, often mentioned hereafter, and it is my privilege to present my thanks to him for this, as well as for his permission to reproduce here some of the maps from his work. The attempt to link up the archaeological, historical and cartographic data of this particular period of history remains however my own responsibility.

In my studies of the ancient Baltic past, I was fortunate in finding a faithful fellow traveller who, with rare kindness and cooperation, opened his rich store of knowledge to me. Dr. V. Ģinters, former Director of the Latvian State Historical Museum, now, as in the difficult years of the publishing of my *Latvian History*, has provided the illustrative part of this booklet with the necessary explanations. My heartfelt thanks to him. I have also to thank Dr. Marta Rasupe, Lecturer at Rome University, who did not spare herself time and trouble in assembling the many amber figurines and ornaments from Italian Museums, especially those of Ferrara and Aquileia. Many thanks also to the poetess Veronika Strēlerte for reading the proofs.

Lastly, I would like to mention with gratitude the many scientific institutions which gave their permission to reproduce maps and illustrations in their possession. They are, in chronological order: The Library of Congress in Washington, The Clarendon Press in Oxford, the Society for the Promotion of Roman Studies in London, The Museo Nazionale in Ferrara, the Museo Archaeologico in Aquileia, and the British Museum in London.

Washington, Spring 1956.

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On the jacket: The Amber Coast: part of Olaus Magnus's *Carta Marina*.
By courtesy of the Royal Library, Stockholm.

CHAPTER I

General approach

Approximately 40—50 million years ago, as modern scientists have determined, when our restless, fated Europe bore the aspect of an archipelago, the so-called “amber forests” grew on the south coast of the vast, primitive continent of Fennoscandia, which geologists are now able to trace on their schematic maps as the combined territories of Finland and Scandinavia.¹

On the whole, these forests were best adapted to a temperate climatic zone, with here and there touches of sub-tropical temperatures. Among other trees in these forests there grew a large number of resinous trees, and in the midst of these grew the “amber pine”.

Life in the animal and vegetable kingdoms of these forests was extremely extensive, and an ordinary observer can perceive various particles of plants and insects of those days encased in the amber. Quoting a popular article on this subject:² “in such pieces of amber are to be found 174 different kinds of insects, 73 species of spiders, flies, ants, moths, *etc.*” The vast, almost inexhaustible supply of amber in Samland (East-Prussia) for instance, gives us a clue to the immense range and intensity of life in those ancient forests.

As in any other primitive forest, there was a relentless struggle for existence among these manifold insects, plants and parasites (*fungi*). The struggle was often intensified by natural phenomena on a dramatically large scale, such as storms, lightning, and climatic changes. The trees damaged by lightning secreted a large amount of resin to heal their wounds and safeguard their existence. It was this fossilized resin which became amber.

The shores which, in the geological ages yet to come, would be the shores of Samland and Jutland, sank, emerged, forming peninsulas and islands, and were submerged again. One of the most restless and changing seas is the Baltic, whose present coastline is geo-

¹ K. André, *Der Bernstein; das Bernsteinland und sein Leben*. 1951, (Kosmos-Bändchen), p. 28.

² G. Ch. Williamson, *The Book of Amber*. 1932; p. 133.

logically one of the most recent;³ and in this process of change the masses of submerged and, in time, petrified amber became overlaid with other different strata. On the amber shores of Prussia, amber is the fourth layer to be found under layers of sand, lignite, and brown coal.

What geological cataclysms and upheavals have resulted in the accumulation and washing up by the sea of huge masses of amber (German scientists call them *Bildungsberd*) precisely in Samland, I am not able to tell; but it is clear that circumstances have been particularly favourable (perhaps some combination of island shores and coastal bays), for this small "peninsula"—almost island—of Samland, framed by the sea, two rivers, and marshes, yields approximately 88 per cent of the world's entire amber harvest (1934 data).⁴ The second largest amber deposit is on the coasts of Jutland, already well known in the remote past. Jutland's store of amber, so important in prehistoric times, has now dwindled considerably. The rest of the existing amber deposits, with the exception of those in Sicily, are to be found outside Europe. But the deposits found in Burma, on the shores of the Straits of Bering, in Siam, in Japan, and elsewhere, are almost negligible compared to those found on the East Prussian coast.

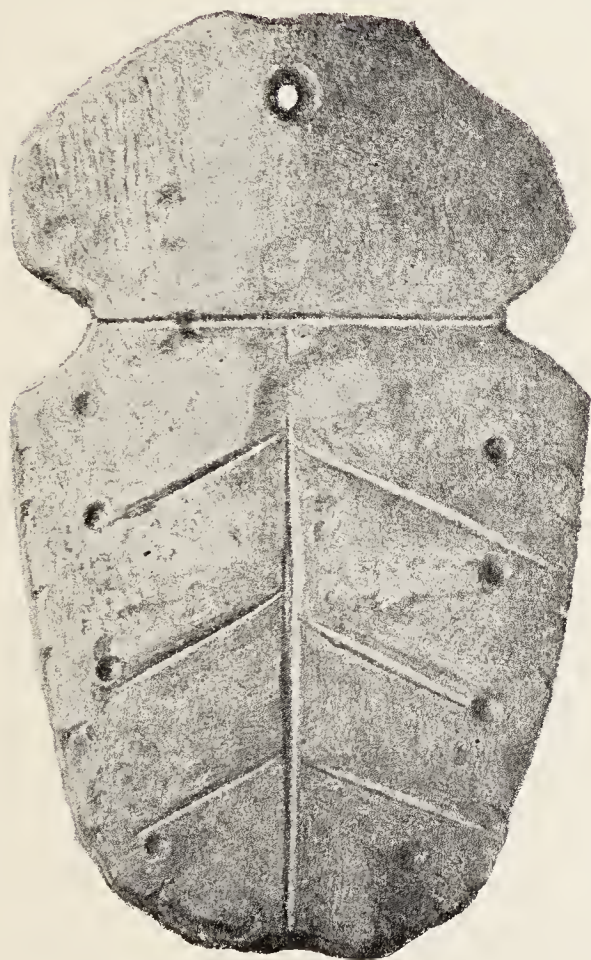
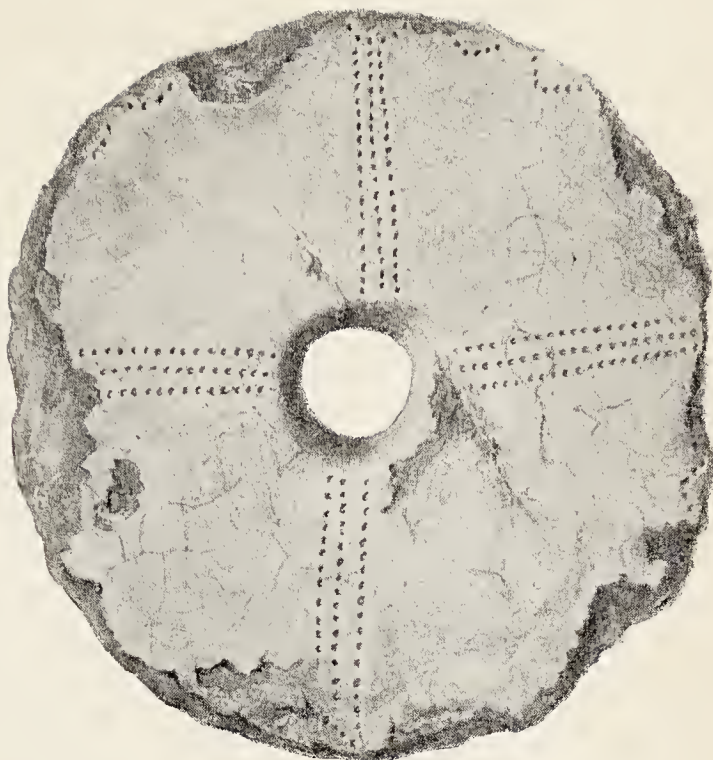
So, from the early days of the world, already hard for us to imagine, on the south-eastern shores of the North and the Baltic Seas, especially during the stormy autumn months, the sea has been washing up ancient amber; and as soon as the people of primitive tribes became conscious of the peculiar attraction and properties of this stone, they began to look for and to gather it, not only to satisfy their craving for beauty, but also because they endowed it with mystical properties and values.

The well known English archaeologist, V. Gordon-Childe, formulates the matter thus: "The forest folk had discovered the amber of East Prussia; they carved it in their own naturalistic style and

³ These geological maps are reproduced in my book *Latvijas vēsture*. 1948; p. 25—28.

⁴ Williamson, *op. cit.*, p. 97.

Amber pendant—an ornament of the Stone Age from East Prussia. First half of the 2nd millenium B. C. Actual size. R. Klebs, *Der Bernsteinschmuck* . . . The cross and ray design indicates a religious meaning: the cult of the sun's wheel. The small cavities of the design were filled with resin, thus achieving an ornamental contrast with the smoothly polished surface. Such amber discs are the oldest known symbols of sun worship in the culture of the Ancient Balts.



Amber pendant—an ornament of anthropomorphic shape of the Stone Age, found at Juodkrante (Schwarzort) on the shores of the Kuršu Märe (in German *das Kurische Haff*), western Lithuania. First half of the 2nd millenium B. C. Actual size. R. Klebs, *Der Bernsteinschmuck* . . .

exported it to Western Norway, Central Russia and Finland.” (Chronologically, the author refers to that era of prehistory which ended 3,000 years B.C.).⁵

I am not trying here to resolve the intricate mental processes of primitive men; I leave this to ethnographers. But it is clear to us from the very first written testimonies on this matter that amber is closely linked with sun-worship.

The first Greek philosopher known to us, Thales of Miletus (640?—546), affirms that amber has a soul; this affirmation being derived from the philosopher’s religious-ontological views on the “soulfulness” of all matter.⁶ The Greek appellation for amber, *elektron*, means in fact “substance of the sun”. Homer, too, in some of his epithets which reflect the aesthetic beliefs and visions of countless generations, displays a similar conception of amber, as well as Pliny the Elder (*quoniam sol vocitatus sit elector*, 37.31), who gathered much information about amber. Generally this approach is proved by “the superstitious reverence in which amber was held in ancient times”. So it is natural that Professor Šturms, basing his data on the Schwarzort amber deposits, has been able to gather a great deal of interesting information about ancient cults and aesthetic modes of expression.⁷

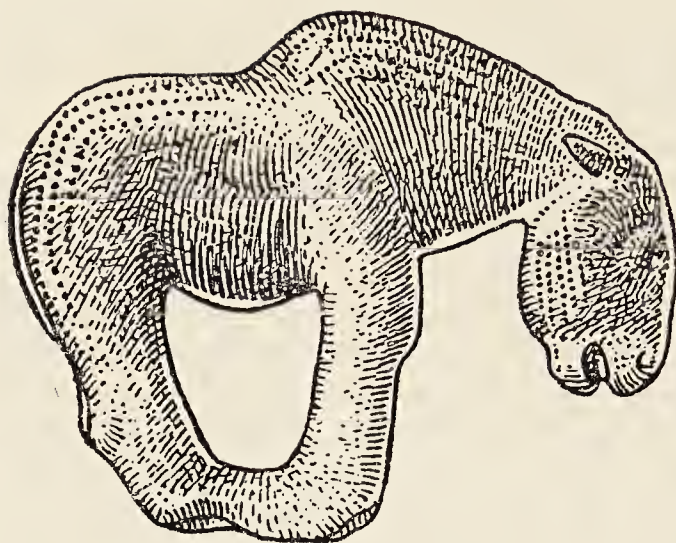
The achievements of our civilization—the very root of these achievements—electricity—come from the same source mentioned above. For example, in *Webster’s Dictionary*, 1954, we read: “electric . . . derived from the Greek *electron*—amber, akin to elector, shining, the sun”. We will not become superstitious, as did our forebears of the Stone Age, but we behold with silent wonder the strange chain of dependence which nature weaves around us.

The history of electricity is thoroughly reviewed by the *New American Encyclopedia* (1954, X 185 sq.), but we will mention

⁵ V. Gordon Childe, *The Dawn of European Civilization*. 3rd ed. 1939; p. 200.

⁶ The original texts are published in the well known book of H. Diels, *Fragmente der Vorsokratiker*. Vol. I.

⁷ Ed. Šturms, *Der Ostbaltische Bernsteinhandel in der Vorchristlichen Zeit* (Jahrbuch des Baltischen Forschungsinstituts). *Commentationes Balticae* I 1953; p. 168—178.



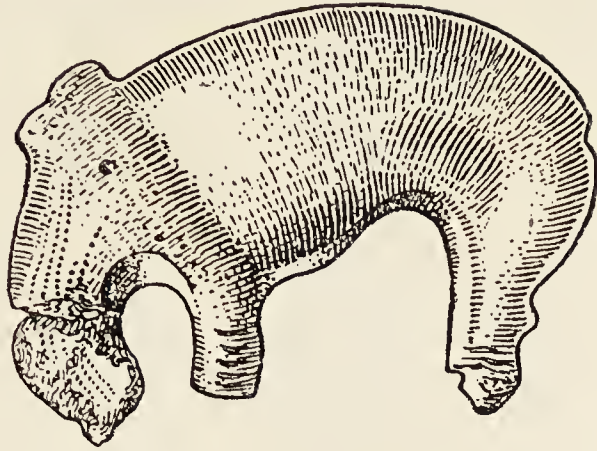
1. Amber horse figurine from Woldenberg, Neumark, Germany. First half of the 2nd millenium B. C. Approximately two thirds of actual size. E. Šturms, *Die neolithische Plastik...*

here only a few facts. In the 17th century, W. Gilbert (1550—1608), a physician at the court of Queen Elizabeth, invented the word electricity, deriving its name from the Greek word signifying amber; and he wrote a very interesting treatise entitled *De Magnete, Magneticisque Corporibus*, 1600. There are also other important research works written in the 17th century—a century filled with scientific discoveries—told to us so vividly by Humboldt in his *Cosmos*.⁸

With whatever mystical powers and properties amber was endowed by early men, this “exuded metal” (*metallum sudaticum*, as Tacitus calls it), was and remains beautiful, very beautiful. The ancient peoples knew it and felt it, and therefore Professor Šturms, in his descriptions of the Schwarzort amber ornaments so dear to the Stone Age women, had no need to emphasize their beauty. (See Amber bead necklaces, p. 169.) As we read further we find passages of Homer referring to it. Here I want to mention the large quantity of amber necklaces, excavated by the famous Schliemann from the ruins of Mycenae, which bear witness that it was “prized by the

⁸ Cf. the most recent biography of Humboldt: Helmut de Terra, *Humboldt; The Life and Times of Alexander von Humboldt, 1769—1859*. 1955.

2. Amber boar figurine from Danzig, Germany. First half of the 2nd millenium B. C. Actual size. E. Šturms, *Die neolithische Plastik* . . .



grandes dames of the court of Agamemnon and by the ladies of Argos and Mycenae and tower-engirded Thebes, as a jewel to adorn their shoulders and bedeck their hair withal”.⁹

Pliny tells us about the Roman ladies who yearned for pale “amber-coloured” hair, and he describes the colour of Poppaea’s hair. Such passages confirm the popular appeal of amber in the drawing rooms of Rome’s higher society. The sweetly sad tale about the Heliades’ tears will be mentioned in the last chapter of this book. I will not quote in full Juvenal’s mention of certain festive goblets, nor Martial’s elegant and sentimental epigrams,¹⁰ although he writes charmingly about a viper, an ant and a bee imprisoned in amber, and he repeatedly compares the delicious fragrance of the substance with the fragrance of a kiss. He refers to the custom, among Roman ladies, of carrying balls of amber to cool their hands. These balls when warmed gave off an agreeable odour. Martial also satirically alludes to the rage in Rome for amber-coloured hair—the hair so greatly admired by southern peoples—and intimates that fashionable ladies quickly changed from brunettes to blondes by the employment of some powerful alkali, or by donning the auburn

⁹ W. A. Buffum, *The Tears of the Heliades; or Amber as a Gem.* 1900; p. 94—96.

¹⁰ Williamson, *op. cit.*, p. 78.

locks of fair Teuton captives, who were frequently shorn of their gleaming tresses with savage cruelty.

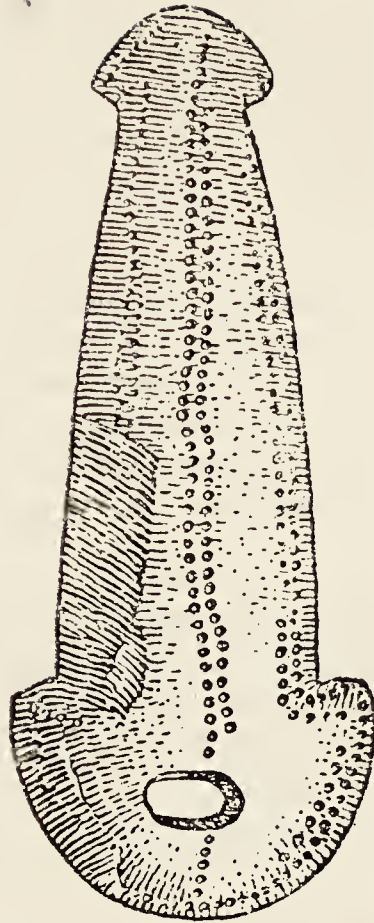
“From caustic lather flames Batavia’s hair;
With captive locks thou may’st seem doubly fair.”

(Buffum, *op.cit.*, p. 103.)

Many of these ladies were primarily mothers, imbued with complex ancient beliefs, so that amber acquired also the functions of a talisman, or charm, especially when worn as a necklace to protect their small children. And so we come to the vast theme of the significance and use of amber in medicine. The functions of amber, as enumerated in one of the 19th century’s first, but scientifically best, Encyclopedias, the well-known unfinished *Ersch and Gruber Encyclopedia* (1818—1850) embrace almost the entire field of medicine. This competent summary reflects the worries, anxieties and hopes of countless generations and shows us to what a large extent this “stone of the sun” has helped to resolve the physical and mental sufferings of humanity. This refers, of course, to ancient times, when, quite apart from the imagined or desired effect of amber on various internal diseases, rheumatism, diseases of the lungs, tooth aches, and throat infections, it was supposed to counteract divers poisons, the “evil eye” and some dangerous magic practices like the so-called anthropomorphic witchcraft. The words of such famous men as the Greek physician Hippocrates, Galen, and our already quoted Pliny, are sufficient guarantee of the truth of these beliefs; and indeed how could it be otherwise when in the creeds of so many men amber was the “extract from the rays of the sun”? (*solis radiorum succum*, Pliny, 37, 36.)

There is not room in this little book for tales of the Middle Ages and of more recent times. Those who are interested will be able to find them in bibliographies, such as the detailed accounts of K. Andrée.

But we, the Balts, have a tale to tell about these more recent times. It will not be gay, for most tales from the Baltic, in historic



3. Amber axe found in the River Vistula at Sandomierz, Poland. First half of the 2nd millenium B. C. Actual size. E. Šturms, *Die neolithische Plastik...*

times, are shrouded with mourning and full of sighs from the past.

The modern Latvian archaeologist, Šturms, concluded his study with the following passage:¹¹ "If we were to ask which people or peoples took part in the exploitation of amber, then we must say that along general lines the answer is clear (*steht diese Deutung... fest*). Funnel-beaker culture (*Trichterbecherkulture*), in all its respective phases of development, is typical of a farming, cattle-growing Indo-European tribe: whereas the tribe of nomad Indo-European warriors, characterized by their fighting weapon, the battle axe, invaded the Baltic approximately 500 years later and

¹¹ Šturms, *op. cit.*, p. 204—205.

slowly assimilated the local peasantry. From the fusion of these two groups of people sprang the Western Balts—the Old Prussians—while from the warrior tribe, on the whole unmixed, issued the Eastern Balts—the Latvians and Lithuanians . . .” This picture appears adequately clear and convincing.

Several centuries later the Old Prussians lost their freedom. When foreigners imposed their rule on the amber shores of the Baltic, they oppressed the conquered Baltic tribes with a heavy bondage.¹² Let us read what some historians, progeny of this conquering stock, have to say. For centuries, during the autumn storms, the waves of the Baltic have washed large pieces of amber from the shores and out to sea, or rolled them along the bottom of the sea. How the gathering of the amber was done in more ancient times we do not know, unless we

¹² For the convenience of the foreign reader who may not be too well informed about the coming of the Teutonic Order to Prussia and to Livonia (actually the territories of Latvia and Estonia), may I be allowed to insert here some chronological data about those happenings. As we can well guess from the scarce historical evidence, the frontier struggles or clashes between the Old-Prussians and the Poles during the Early Middle Ages lasted for many centuries. One of the most recent interpretations of those events—not from the Baltic point of view, however—is to be found in the book of Francis Dvornik, *The Making of Central and Eastern Europe*, 1949. At the very beginning of the 13th century the situation seemed to have become quite unbearable for the Poles, because the Duke of Masovia, Konrad, called for help on the Teutonic Order, which after having evacuated its initial seats in Palestine and after some not too outstanding deeds in Hungary, had become “unemployed”. Some Polish historians consider this political and military move of Duke Konrad as the “biggest mistake in all Polish history”. Indeed with joint Polish-German efforts—as so often happened to the helpless Balts when they had come under a double pressure, the Slav and the German—the resistance of the Old-Prussians was crushed, but the true conqueror, the Order, had absolutely no intention of giving up the subdued lands. In 1226 the Master of the Order, the well known H. von Salza, obtained from the Emperor the so-called Golden Charter (*cf.* my *History of Latvia*, 1951, p. 124 *sq.* and 132 *sq.*, *cf.* also Plate XVI). The struggle of the Old-Prussians with the two biggest powers of that time, the Pope and the Emperor, was virtually hopeless, but their stubborn determination to pay any price for their liberty transformed these struggles of three-quarters of a century into inhuman slaughter on both sides, later to be known as the most tragic pages in human history. The events in Livonia were more or less similar (parallel) to the events in Prussia, and the description of them—as a Balt feels and considers them to be—can be found in my above mentioned book (Chapt. VI).

take into account Tacitus's confusing tale on this matter (see below); but we can begin to form some idea by the Middle Ages, especially during the Renaissance. For instance, there is the famous geographer, Kluver, born in Danzig, in whose book entitled *Germaniae Antiquae libri tres* (1613) there are some lengthy descriptions of amber harvests. In later times, we find even more references in special historical works on amber. There are also illustrations of men clad in leather suits, with long pointed poles in their hands and special nets on their shoulders. There are other significant drawings which we shall mention later on. In short, we begin to comprehend the various methods of acquiring amber, which are defined by the three German technical words: *lesen, stechen, graben*.

And now let us come to the promised quotations:¹³ "In Samland, in Tacitus's time, amber was the unquestioned possession of the finder. The real monopoly of amber, establishing the state's first claim to its possession, was started by the Dukes of Pomerania in those regions around Danzig which looked out to the sea. Also the Teutonic Order, after it had conquered Prussia, maintained these rights, but in order to increase the economic strength of the land and raise its revenues the Order transformed them into a total state monopoly of all the amber gathered on those shores. The income raised by these measures was considered among the most important of the state's revenues."

To prevent the amber from being stolen or sold to workshops, to be fashioned into ornaments and other decorative objects, such workshops were located as far as possible from the places where the amber was found. One of the oldest of these guilds, named *Paternostermacher*, or "makers of rosaries", was founded in Bruges (1302), and followed in chronological order by the guilds of Lübeck (1310), Danzig (1477), Elbing (1539) and Königsberg (1641) which existed until 1811. To continue the quotation: "A heavy *corvée* was imposed upon the inhabitants of Samland—detailed to fish for and gather amber—following the conquest of Prussia by

¹³ K. Andrée, *Bernstein und seine Bedeutung in Natur- und Geisteswissenschaften, Kunst und Kunstgewerbe, Technik, Industrie und Handel*. 1937; p. 154 sq.

the Teutonic Order, and the bondage of this servitude lasted for centuries. It was made heavier by cruel penalties (including death by hanging) for the unlawful appropriation of amber. A few ancient drawings show us a large number of gibbets along the hills of Samland's coast, but soon even the last of these 'hangman's hills'—the one near the village of Dirschkeim—will be swallowed by the sea. Today it still stands several feet above sea level, but 20—25 years ago it had the aspect of a fairly large pyramid" (one of these descriptive illustrations is reproduced by Andrée in his book). "It is no wonder that these bitter memories have found their way into the local legends. There is, for instance, the legend of the ghostly riders careering from place to place, inciting people to revolt against the Order's oppressive amber *corvées*. Particularly harsh feelings were aroused by Anselmus of Lozenstein, at one time the *Vogt* (judge) of Samland, who used to punish every case of amber pilferage with instant hanging. Because of this, the local legend has it that his spirit is compelled to wander along the seashore on stormy nights crying out: *Ob, um Gott, Börnstein frei, Börnstein frei . . .*"

Do not the Erinyes, Greek Goddesses of revenge, wander at this very moment along the afflicted shores of the Baltic? Does it not seem at times as though we hear the moans of the earth itself?

*

It will not be unprofitable, I think, to measure the beliefs and enthusiasms aroused in ancient peoples by their first contact with amber (which we have briefly reviewed above) against the wider perspectives of the rest of the world. This was done by the so-called lapidaries of the Middle Ages who used to study the properties and supernatural powers of rare and precious stones, basing their findings on the beliefs of those days. Among these special treatises—from the early lapidaries and the Greek Theophrastus to the "classical" centuries (12th and 13th) of the Middle Ages—an outstanding place belongs to Pliny, as we find in the genealogical tables of some



Amber human figurines of the Stone Age from Juodkrante (Schwarzort), western Lithuania. First half of the 2nd millenium B. C. Actual size. H. Kühn, *Die Kunst Alteuropas...*; R. Klebs, *Der Bernsteinschmuck...* These primitively shaped human figurines were endowed with magic or religious attributes and belong to the Finnish-Ugrian culture.

of these lapidaries.¹⁴ This is important for us to know, although amber is hardly mentioned by the lapidaries of the later Middle Ages. We can also sense from Pliny's tale (see Chap. II) that in early times, this "stone of the sun" was surrounded by the magic and astronomical beliefs of bygone generations, interspersed here and there with threads of a critical and scientific nature.

What amber has been to our continent, jade must have been to the China of hundreds of years ago, and to the still more remote civilizations of America. The lapidaries mentioned above pay considerable attention to jade. The etymology of the word in itself, shows us the way in which our world became acquainted with this exotic stone, which can, even in modern times, stimulate exquisite aesthetic pleasure when fashioned by Chinese craftsmen. The French and English term "jade" (each with its own pronunciation), originates from the Spanish *ijada*, or *piedra de ijada*, which means stones of the kidney (similar to the German *Nierenstein*). The Spanish "j", which in the modern language is pronounced as "h", was gradually transformed in the 16th and 17th centuries from "z" to "s" and finally into an "h" sound.

To help us sense the primitive peoples' approach to the mysteries of nature, an approach which might well have been common to civilizations that had no inkling of one another's existence, I will give one quotation from the work of a well-known and recognized historian:¹⁵ "So many are the points of coincidence between China and Mexico on the use, the manner of carving and polishing jade, the artistic styles, and the beliefs in the supernatural powers of the stone that it is difficult not to believe in a common origin, though it has been established by spectroscopic analysis that Asiatic and American jades are two different varieties of the same stone . . .

"Both the Chinese and Mexicans attributed magic powers to jade and considered it the most precious of materials. Both carved jade

¹⁴ Cf. *Anglo-Norman Lapidaries*, by P. Studer . . . and J. Evans . . . Paris, 1924 (Table of Sources, Table of Stones, etc.).

¹⁵ M. Covarrubias, *The Eagle, the Jaguar, and the Serpent; Indian Art of the Americas*. 1954; p. 103—105.

exquisitely, wore it as an amulet, made offerings of it, and buried it with their dead. For the early Chinese of the pre-Buddhist Shang and Chou dynasties, jade had the property of preventing decay; they used to seal the orifices of the corpse, placing a jade cicada inside the mouth of the dead as a symbol of reincarnation. The ancient Mexicans also were in the habit of placing a jade bead in the mouth of their dead, and both Chinese and Mexicans painted their funerary jades with red cinnabar. To complicate matters, the style and decoration of some Chinese and Mexican jades are surprisingly similar . . . It is proved that jade is native to America, and was mined intensely in ancient times, to judge from the enormous amount of pre-Spanish objects of carved jade known from every middle American period. Jade is not often found in large veins or deposits, however, but generally appears in isolated boulders in river beds or ravines, where probably no one has searched for it. Furthermore, only an expert can distinguish between an ordinary stone and a boulder with a heart of jade. In China, professional jade prospectors search for the boulders of jade in remote, deep ravines; their methods for identifying these boulders are jealously guarded family secrets. Similar methods were apparently employed in pre-Spanish Mexico, for Bernardino de Sahagun (16th century chronicler-monk, A. Sp.) tells of information transmitted to him by his Aztec informants who had probably obtained it by hearsay: 'There are those who know where the precious stones grow, and in fact a precious stone where it is, emanates a subtle vapor and those who search for such stones place themselves in a convenient place at sunrise and look in the direction of the sun, and when they see the delicate smoke rising, they know there are precious stones there . . . if they find a stone from which the vapor rises they know it contains a precious stone and they break it to find it' . . . There is another clue to places where precious stones grow, particularly those called *chalchibuitl* (Aztec name for jade, A. Sp.), because wherever they are buried the weeds are always green, as these stones give out a cool and humid exhalation . . . The carved jades of the

early period of Middle America . . . are predominantly in the varieties of translucent blue-green, bluish gray and spinach-green jade.”

Ivory, jade and amber—what a unique combination of colour, feeling and touch, and what horizons and possibilities they open!

That inborn smoothness, pale and elegant disdaining to shine,
That exotic gleam, blue-green unrest of unknown and mystic horizons,

Intimate play of light, like the rays of a northern sun,
which caresses but does not inflame.

Would such be the modern lapidary?

CHAPTER II

Texts of classical authors

Amber and tin, no doubt, were the first commodities, before all others, to rouse the interest of the peoples of the ancient world in the north and the west of Europe, and it is important to note that the development of civilization was stimulated and furthered by the trade of those commodities.”¹

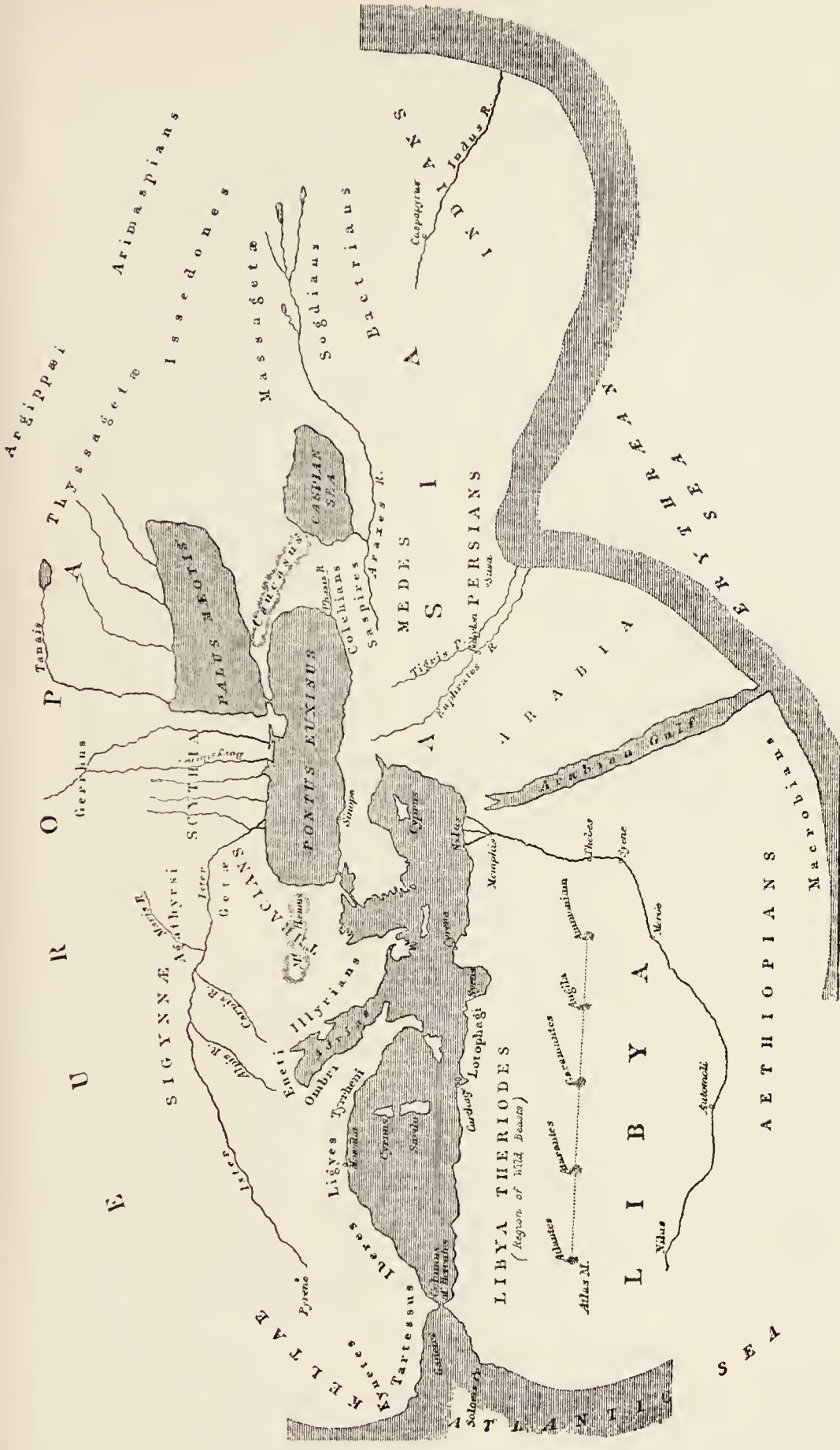
Today no one challenges the truthfulness of the first part of this quotation. The man of the Bronze Age—to mention only this phase in the development of mankind—was in some way symbolized by the bronze arms and by the amber sacred ornaments—both his physical and spiritual means of defence, so to speak. Bronze and amber—indeed an intrinsic harmony in colour and, be it said, in “substance”.

It is known that tin in Europe is scarce. Nevertheless, it was a necessary basis for hardening copper, the percentage of alloy in bronze weapons generally being 90 per cent copper and 10 per cent tin. The finding of tin was thus one of the first conditions for the man of the Bronze Age to survive. It had to be obtained from its chief source, from the “wild west” of Europe, a distant corner then wrapped in a veil of legends, from the so-called Cassiterides islands. “The tin mines of Cornwall are old. Whether the Cassiterides islands mentioned by ancient authors are situated precisely there or elsewhere, has been a subject of broad discussion which, however, is not as important as the fact itself that tin in ancient times actually came from here (Cornwall).”

Brought to the Mediterranean regions, tin was, as is known, used as an alloy of copper to form bronze. “According to the acknowledgments of modern science the discovery of bronze (*Zinnbronze*) was made in the eastern Mediterranean, in Egypt or Crete, around the middle of the third millenium B.C. or even earlier.”²

¹ Buffum, *op. cit.*, p. 66.

² *Reallexicon der Vorgeschichte* (Max Ebert), pp. 181 and 184. The most recent synthetic view on the prehistoric development of the copper and tin alloys is to be found in V. Gordon Childe's book *Piecing Together the Past. The Interpretation of Archæological Data*. 1956; p. 89 sq.



Map 1. The world according to Herodotus. From E. H. Bunbury, *A History of Ancient Geography*...

These few quotations strongly indicate the ways and phases of the "coming of tin" to the workshops of the Mediterranean lands. It is marked by hard, pitiless struggles of commercial competition, battles for the monopoly of its trade. On the outcome of these struggles depended the decline or rise of many peoples and cities. The Phoenicians and the Carthaginians were for a long period of time masters of the situation;³ then they engaged in mortal combat with the new-born Massilia (6th century B.C.). "Although the existence of Britain had long been known to the Phoenicians of Gades who traded with the inhabitants, and although Greeks, such as the explorer Pytheas, had visited the island and noted both its fertility and its exceptionally moist climate, it is probable that few Romans even knew its name. It is almost certain that the tin which was brought from the mysterious Cassiterides really came from Cornwall, but those merchants who traded in it had every reason for keeping close such a valuable secret, and there is a tale of one Gaditane who deliberately ran his ship aground sooner than let a Roman merchant, who followed him, learn the way there. Yet a great deal of trade was carried on long before Caesar invaded our land: the Veneti of Armorica (north-west of Brittany. A.Sp.) had found it very profitable and were prepared therefore to offer a determined resistance to his advance (*Bell. Gall. cap. IV*). When conquered they refused to give any information which would have helped him in his invasion."⁴

The amber routes from the North to the Mediterranean are much more obscure in the ancient texts, as can be seen, for instance, from the quoted passages of Diodorus. Without the help of archaeology the explorer found it very difficult to see his way, at least not until the Pliny period. There are only a few rare quotations which, however, allow one for a moment to grasp the existence of vast perspectives in the abyss of time. There is a passage in Herodotus

³ In H. Hassinger's book *Geographische Grundlagen der Geschichte*, 1953; on page 168 a very instructive map in this regard is printed: Geographischer Gesichtskreis der Phöniker-Punier.

⁴ M. P. Charlesworth, *Trade-routes and Commerce of the Roman Empire*; 1926. French translation 1938, Italian 1940.

where he tells about the “coming” of amber to the lands of the Aegean sea (III, 115). Homer, too, long before Herodotus, mentions amber in several places, usually in connection with gold. For instance, in the description of the king’s palace resplendent in copper, gold, amber, ivory and silver (Od. IV, 72—75); in the gift given to the faithful Penelope by her admirer—a necklace of amber and gold, “like the Sun” (Od. XVIII, 294—295); and, finally, in the description of the cunning Phoenician merchant (Od. XV, 459 *sq.*—how characteristic that it should be a Phoenician merchant!) who turns the heads of the honest servants with his marvellous jewel made of gold and amber (*ὄρμον . . . πολυδαίδαλον . . . χρύσειον ἠλέκτροισιν ἐερόμενον ἠέλιον ὥς*). Let us also remember Theophrastus (*De lap.* 16) who tells us that amber comes from the North Sea.

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In this chapter there are gathered the most important quotations from the classical authors who write about the tin and amber routes from the North and the West to the Mediterranean countries. I want to present these to the interested reader, for in the world of today, reading of ancient texts is not much in fashion. The supplement of bibliographical notes in the relevant places is necessary, even indispensable, yet from these “dry” statistics some reader may have the impression of reading rather some sort of a flower seed catalogue, whereas my intention is to offer him a bouquet of fragrant flowers with a long forgotten scent.

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HERODOTUS (trans. by Henry Cary) in the third book of his history, having deliberated on the Persians, Egyptians, Indians and Arabs, and having told many a strange tale about these exotic lands, tells also in his Chapter 115 everything he knows about the amber river Eridanus and the tin islands (*νήσους Κασσιτερίδας*). To get the feeling of his rather vague notions, let us note that



Bronze figurines from Asia Minor.

(a) Found in Serniai, district of Klaipėda (Memel), western Lithuania. About 1200 B. C. Two thirds of actual size. S. Przeworski, *Znalezisko Kruhowickie*.

(b) Found in Northern Syria. M. Vieyra, *Hittite Art*.

Both figurines belong to a group of ancient oriental deities, presumably gods of the sun, and have been found in different stylistic shapes in all those regions of Asia Minor where a Hittite influence can be traced. Single specimens of similar figurines have been found also in the regions of the Aegean and the Mediterranean cultures, as far westward as Portugal. The figurine found near Klaipėda and another one of a different shape found in Lithuania and now in the possession of the National Museum in Helsinki originally came from the northern shores of the Black Sea or from the Caucasus and provide proof of the far-reaching trade relations of those times. About the same time amber ornaments appeared in Mesopotamia and Asia Minor. This amber has not been proved to be Baltic amber, but the presence of the oriental bronze figurines in Baltic soil make this deduction plausible. Very probably the amber finds of the Mycenae tombs arrived there along the same route: from the Baltic to the Black Sea.

shortly before this account he was telling of the "wondrous ways" of gathering cinnamon in Arabia, incense or gold and ivory in Ethiopia. The chapter in question (III, 115) reads as follows:

"These then are the extremities of Asia and Libya. Concerning the western extremities of Europe I am unable to speak with certainty, for I do not admit that there is a river called by barbarians Eridanus which discharges itself into the sea towards the north, from which amber is said to come; nor am I acquainted with the Cassiterides islands, from whence our tin comes. For in the first place, the name Eridanus shows that it is Grecian and not barbarian, and feigned by some poet; in the next place, though I have diligently inquired, I have never been able to hear from any man who has himself seen it, that there is a sea on that side of Europe. However, both tin and amber come to us from the remotest parts."

In the next chapter (116) Herodotus already navigates in the waters of geographic legends: "Towards the north of Europe there is evidently a very great quantity of gold, but how procured, I am unable to say with certainty; though it is said that the Arimaspians, a one-eyed people, steal it from the Griffins. Neither do I believe this, that men are born with one eye, and yet in other respects resemble the rest of mankind. However, the extremities of the world seem to surround and enclose the rest of the earth, and to possess those productions which we account most excellent and rare."

These few sentences are so expressive that there is no need for further comment. However, I would like to refer the reader to those pages by the "father of history" which deal with the northern shores of the Black Sea, especially the Greek colony Olbia (meaning happy, wealthy). This parallel passage should be most enlightening (IV, 17, 18, 53, *etc.*).

*

About the life and deeds of the famous traveller, astronomer and geographer Pytheas, there is only some fragmentary news of a

highly polemical character in the classical texts of antiquity. The authors are Pliny (4.104 and 37.35), Strabo, and some less important ones. Modern science is generally well disposed towards the Massaliote explorer, contrary to the attitude of earlier scholars who were under the influence of Strabo's anger and discontent, inexplicable to us, towards Pytheas, whom he even calls a great liar (*ἀνήρ ψευδέστατος*).⁵ We can only surmise that the tales of the Massaliote about northern lands and seas, tales spiced with a mixture of exaggerations, legends and distorted traditions, sounded like anything but the truth to the ears of the Asia Minor-born geographer. According to the most recent investigations, Pytheas's journey, worthy of admiration given the epoch, might have included—in the direction which interests us—Helgoland, the estuary of the Elbe, or perhaps the coast of Denmark, *etc.*

Many are the interpretations of his itinerary. Some students have him travel up to the river Rhone and across Gaul, and through to the Atlantic, thus enabling him to avoid the Straits of Gibraltar, since the first part of the 6th century B.C. already "blocked" by the Phoenicians. (Britain, it is believed, was discovered by some errant mariners in the 8th century B.C.). If this hypothesis proves to be correct, then Pytheas's journey may have had close connections with the amber trade routes of the Rhone, the Rhine and perhaps also the Elbe. This is the opinion of R. Hennig, to be quoted repeatedly in this booklet, expressed in his *Wege des Verkehrs* (1939, p.p. 22—23, 47—48). The river Elbe, according to Hennig's theory, ought to be identified with the legendary name Eridanus, in later times generally thought to refer to the river Po. He writes:⁶ "At the time Massilia was founded, the amber routes went from the lower part of the river Elbe to the Rhine, then followed

⁵ The most recent investigations are quoted in Paul Hermann's *Conquest of Man*. 1954; p. 106—111, where a hypothetical map of Pytheas's travels is also reproduced. Cf. also R. Hennig, *Terræ Incognitæ, Eine Zusammenstellung und kritische Bewertung der wichtigsten vorkolumbischen Entdeckungsreisen an Hand der darüber vorliegenden Originalberichte*, I, 1936; p. 120—135, and H. Hassinger, *op. cit.*, p. 218.

⁶ Hennig, *op. cit.*, p. 133—134.

the course of this river and afterwards the river Rhone, splitting into two branches in the middle course of this river, one of them going up the Elbe and after passing the Alps at the Brenner Pass, followed the Adige in the direction of the northern shores of the Adriatic." It would be well if things were as clear as they were then thought to be. Let us quote a passage from Polybius (III, 42—*The Loeb Classical Library*) which will give us a glimpse of the matter of ancient trading. Polybius describes there the crossing of the Rhone by Hannibal's troops (219 B.C.) [this quotation at a glance may remind one of the Byzantine Emperor Constantine's (10th century A.D.) account of navigation on the Dnieper practiced by the Slav tribes]: "Hannibal, on reaching the neighbourhood of the river, at once set about attempting to cross it where the stream is single at a distance of about four days' march from the sea. Doing his best to make friends with the inhabitants of the bank, he bought up all their canoes and boats, amounting to a considerable number, since many of the people on the banks of the Rhone engage in maritime traffic. He also got from them the logs suitable for making the canoes, so that in two days he had an innumerable quantity of ferry-boats." How "clearly" Polybius had visualized the geography of those parts, can be seen from his assertion, as follows (III, 47): "The Rhone rises north-west of the head of the Adriatic on the northern slope of the Alps, and running in a south-westerly direction, falls into the Sardinian Sea."

Pytheas's journey, according to the latest findings, took place around the year 320 B.C.

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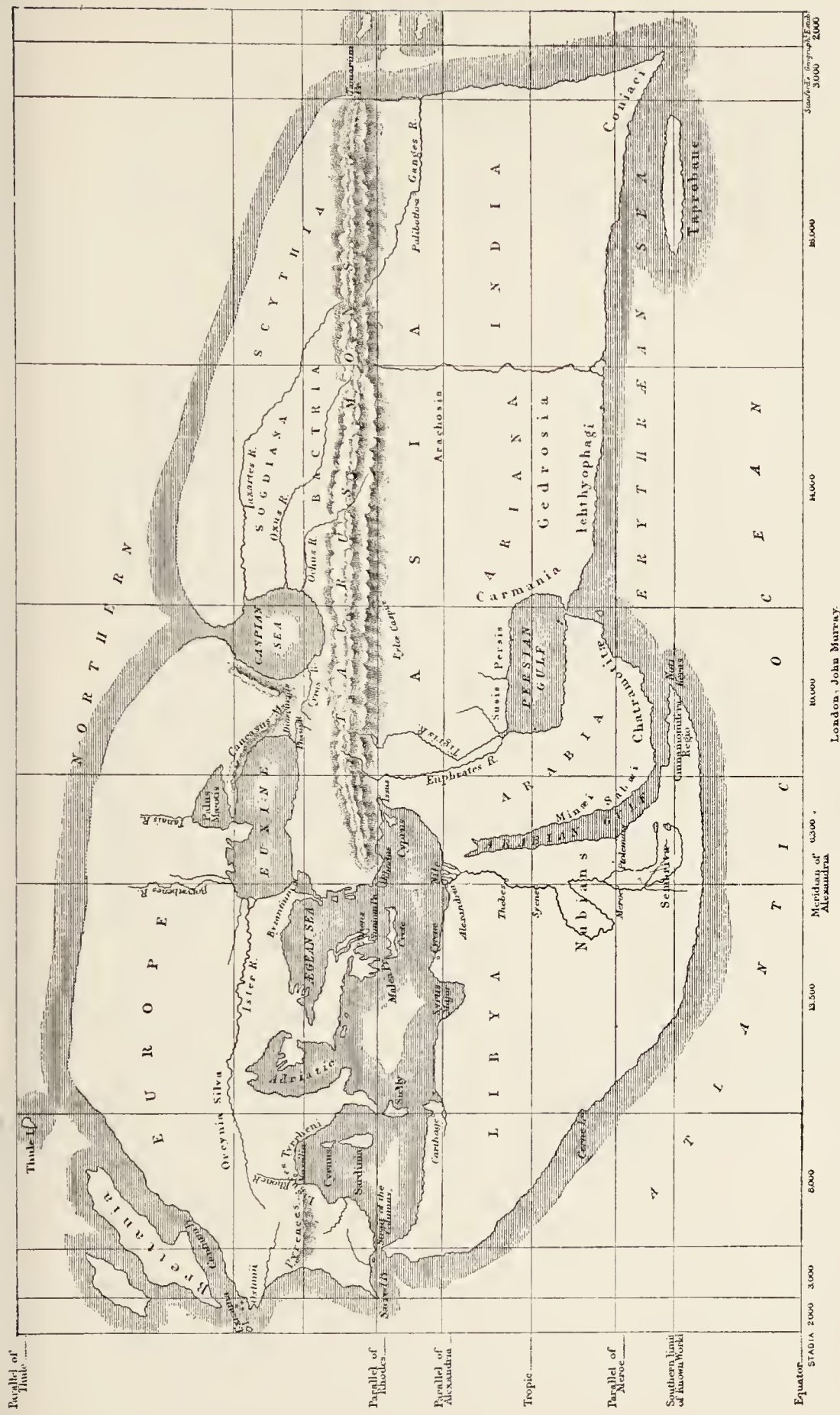
At this point it is well to mention a little known but in my opinion a very important quotation regarding one route called the Holy Road (*ἱερά ὁδός*) from Italy to the Celtic countries. It is to be found in Chap. LXXXV of the so-called Pseudo-Aristoteles *De mirabilibus auscultationibus* (*The Loeb Classical Library, Aristotle, Minor Works*, p. 273): "They say that there is a road called

'the Heracleian' from Italy as far the Celts, Celtoligyes, and Iberians, through which, if a Greek or native travels, he is guarded by the inhabitants, that no harm may befall him; and that they exact punishment from those through whom such harm comes."

In short, do not these few lines provide some sort of a clue to the concepts of commerce in ancient times?

But with this text the interest we may have in *On Marvellous Things Heard* does not end. The paragraph 8.1 (*The Loeb Classical Library, Aristotle, p. 269—271*), so far ignored, as I know, by students of the amber trade, runs as follows: "In the Electrides Islands, which lie in the gulf of the Adriatic, they say that two statues have been dedicated, one of tin and one of copper, wrought in the old-fashioned style. It is said that these are the works of Daedalus, a reminder of the old days, when escaping from Minos he came to this district from Sicily and Crete. They say that the River Eridanus 'silted up' these islands. There is a lake apparently near the river, containing hot water. A heavy and unpleasant smell comes from it, and no animal ever drinks it nor does bird fly over it without falling and dying. It has a circumference of two hundred furlongs, and a breadth of ten. The local inhabitants say that Phaethon fell into this lake when he was struck by a thunderbolt. There are many poplars in it, from which oozes so-called *electron*. They say that is like gum and hardens like a stone; it is collected by the inhabitants and brought to the Greeks. They say that Daedalus came to these islands, and putting in there set up in one of them his own image, and in the other that of his son Icarus. Later on, when the Pelasgians, who were expelled from Argos, sailed there, Daedalus fled, and sailed to the island of Icarus."

Is not this symbiosis of real experience, hear-say, and legends, reflecting the "wanderings" of amber in far remote days, rather exciting? From a purely mythological point of view there are not only some known topics of the amber legends, but also a poetic connection of the legend cycles of the two fanciful and unhappy "explorers of the skies", Phaethon and Icarus. As concerns the long aged experience of the amber trade, I would turn the attention of the



Map 2. Map of the world according to Eratosthenes. From E. H. Bunbury: *A History of Ancient Geography* . . .

London, John Murray.

reader to the initial description of the two statues "in the old-fashioned style", made of the two metals, tin and copper, which were the alloy of bronze.

*

It may now be of some interest to quote the well known historian Polybius (*The Loeb Classical Library*). His place from our point of view is somewhere half way between the more or less legendary account of Pytheas's journey and the great authors of the Roman Empire, and their ever increasing news about Northern Europe. He lived 205—123? B.C. The Greek Polybius, taken hostage by the Romans from his politically collapsing country, had watched, even admired with unfailing interest, the powerful beginnings of this great Empire. The Greek Strabo, on the other hand, was the one to endow the new-born Roman Empire, which at that time had already reached the peak of its fame, with the glory of his synthetic vision of the world. Already, from the few pages translated here, we can judge the force of Polybius's pen, and it is important to us, since this author was one of the first to explore Western Europe, and, to a certain extent, one of the first to explore and describe Europe's "Wild West", even though he seemed at times to be slightly dazzled by his own brilliance. At any rate, through his approach to the problem one can sense a new turning point in the development of the world.

For the visual illustration of what is said here, Eratosthenes's schematic map, dating one generation after Polybius, will be useful.

About Polybius's journey outside the Pillars of Hercules we know very little indeed (Pliny V, 9) (*Scipione Aemiliano res in Africa gerente Polybius annalium conditor ab eo accepta classe scrutandi illius orbis gratia circumvectus, etc.*) (There follow details of African fauna and flora, of little interest, however, to us).

*

POLYBIUS, *The Histories* (*The Loeb Classical Library*).

III, 37. ... The whole earth ... is divided into three parts, each with its name, the one part being called Asia, the second Africa, and the third Europe. Their respective boundaries are the river Don, the Nile, and the straits of the Pillars of Hercules.

.....
 ... Europe lies opposite to them on the north shore of this sea (the Mediterranean), extending continuously from east to west, its most compact and deepest portion lying due north between the Don and the Narbo, the latter river being not far to the west of Marseilles and of the mouth by which the Rhone discharges itself into the Sardinian Sea. The Celts inhabit the country near the Narbo and beyond it as far as the chain of the Pyrenees, which stretches in an unbroken line from the Mediterranean to the Outer Sea, that portion which is washed by the Mediterranean as far as the Pillars of Hercules being called Iberia, while that part which lies along the Outer or Great Sea has no general name, as it has only recently come under notice, but is all densely inhabited by barbarous tribes of whom I shall speak more particularly on a subsequent occasion.

III, 38. Just as with regard to Asia and Africa where they meet in Aethiopia no one up to the present has been able to say with certainty whether the southern extension of them is continuous land or is bounded by a sea, so that part of Europe which extends to the north between the Don and Narbo is up to now unknown to us, and will remain so unless the curiosity of explorers leads to some discoveries in the future. We must pronounce that those who either by word of mouth or in writing make rash statements about these regions have no knowledge of them, and invent mere fables ...

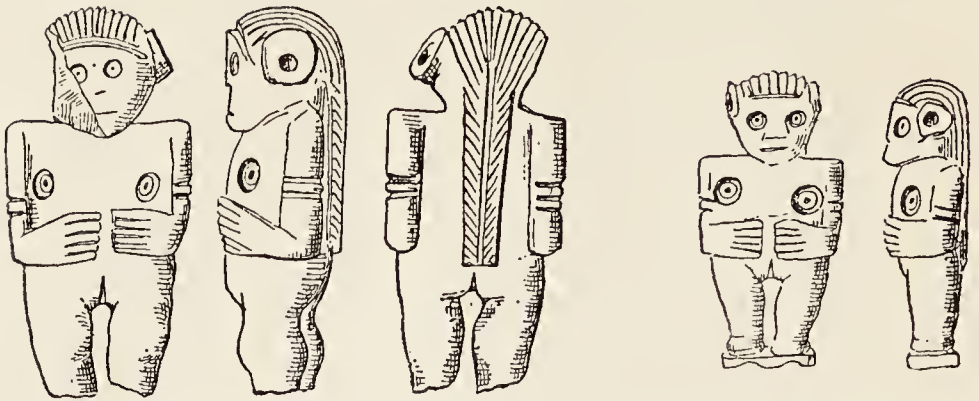
III, 58. While nearly all authors, or at least the greater number have attempted to describe the peculiarities and the situation of



Amber statuette of Ashur-nasir-apal, King of Assyria (885—860 B. C.). Actual size. A. T. Olmstead, *Amber Statuette of Ashur-nasir-apal...* The breast of the statuette is covered with finely ornamented gold plate. This Assyrian amber statuette of the 9th century B. C. was found on the banks of the river Tigris where the Assyrian town of Kalhu (Calah of Genesis) was once situated. The amber of this statuette has been chemically tested and was found to be Baltic amber. It cannot be precisely ascertained whether it came from the Eastern or the Western Baltic, but the ancient south-eastern trade routes of the Eastern Baltic (see Plate III) indicate the former as the probable place of origin. Amber of the same period was found also in the ancient graves of the Kuban region in Northern Caucasus. In the capitals of Assyria, Asher and Babel, amber beads were found in the foundations of temple towers. Amber is also mentioned in Assyrian jewelers' lists dating back to approximately 1st millenium B. C.

the countries at the extremities of the known world, most of them are mistaken on many points. We must therefore by no means pass over the subject, but we must say a word to them, and that not casually and by scattered allusions, but giving due attention to it, and in what we say we must not find fault with or rebuke them, but rather be grateful to them and correct them when wrong; knowing as we do that they, too, had they the privilege of living at the present day, would correct and modify many of their own statements. In old times, indeed, we find very few Greeks who attempted to inquire into the outlying parts of the world, owing to the practical impossibility of doing so; for the sea had so many perils that it is difficult to enumerate them, and the land ever so many more. Again, even if anyone by his own choice or by the force of circumstances reached the extremity of the world, that did not mean that he was able to accomplish his purpose. For it was a difficult matter to see many things at all closely with one's own eyes, owing to some of the countries being utterly barbarous and others quite desolate, and it was still more difficult to get information about the things one did see, owing to the difference of the language. Then, even if anyone did see for himself and observe the facts, it was even more difficult for him to be moderate in his statements, to scorn all talk of marvels and monsters and, preferring truth for its own sake, to tell us nothing beyond it.

III, 59. As, therefore, it was almost impossible in old times to give a true account of the regions I speak of, we should not find fault with the writers for their omissions or mistakes, but should praise and admire them, considering the times they lived in, for having ascertained something on the subject and advanced our knowledge. But in our own times since, owing to Alexander's empire in Asia and that of the Romans in other parts of the world, nearly all regions have become approachable by sea or land, since our men of action in

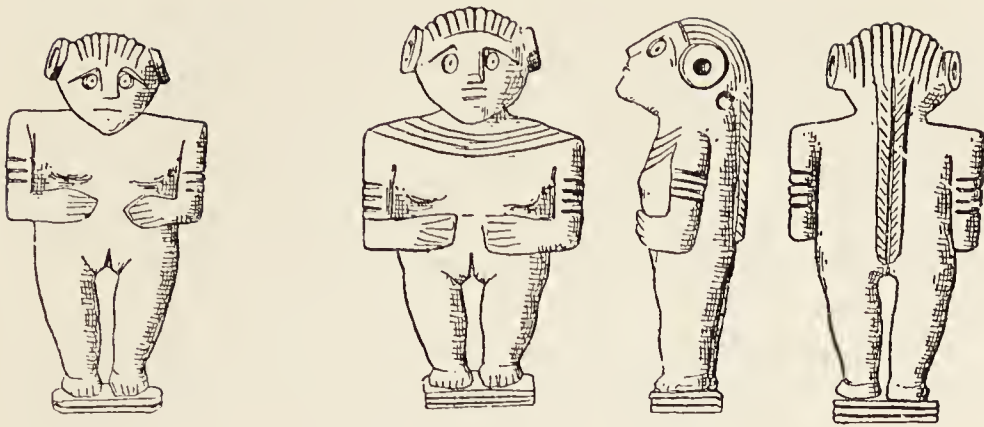


4. Amber female figurines from Vetulonia (present-day Colonna), Italy. 7th century B. C. Actual size. L. A. Milani, *L'arte e la religione* . . . In the ancient tombs of Vetulonia many amber figurines, probably amulets, have been found; among these many of the oriental deity of fecundity. Also the sumptuous bed-covers, embroidered with countless small raw amber pieces, found in the same tombs, seem to have been attributed a special significance.

Greece are relieved from the ambitions of a military or political career and have therefore ample means for inquiry and study, we ought to be able to arrive at a better knowledge and something more like the truth about lands which were formerly little known. This is what I myself will attempt to do when I find a suitable place in this work for introducing the subject, and I shall then ask those who are envious about such things to give their undivided attention to me, in view of the fact that I underwent the perils of journeys through Africa, Spain, and Gaul, and of voyages on the seas that lie on the farther side of these countries, mostly for this very purpose of correcting the errors of former writers and making those parts of the world also known to the Greeks.

DIODORUS OF SICILY (*The Loeb Classical Library*).

V, 20. In ancient time this island (beyond the Pillars of Hercules. A. Sp.) remained undiscovered because of its distance from the entire inhabited world, but it was discovered at a later period for the following reason. The Phoenicians, who from



ancient times on made voyages continually for purposes of trade, planted many colonies through Libya and not a few as well in the western parts of Europe. And since their ventures turned out according to their expectations, they amassed great wealth and essayed to voyage beyond the Pillars of Heracles into the sea which men call the ocean. And, first of all, upon the Strait itself by the Pillars they founded a city on the shores of Europe, and since the land formed a peninsula they called the city Gadeira (Cadiz. A. Sp.); in the city they built many works appropriate to the nature of the region, and among them a costly temple of Heracles, and they instituted magnificent sacrifices which were conducted after the manner of the Phoenicians. And it has come to pass that this shrine has been held in a honour beyond the ordinary, both at the time of its building and in comparatively recent days down even to our own lifetime. Also many Romans, distinguished men who have performed great deeds, have offered vows to this god, and these vows they have performed after the completion of their successes.⁷

V, 21. But since we have set forth the facts concerning the ocean lying off Libya and its islands, we shall now turn our

⁷ Cf. J. Oliver Thomson, *History of Ancient Geography*. 1948; pp. 53 and 88.

discussion to Europe. Opposite that part of Gaul which lies on the ocean and directly across from the Hercynian Forest, as it is called, which is the largest of any in Europe of which tradition tells us, there are many islands out in the ocean, of which the largest is that known as Britain. In ancient times this island remained unvisited by foreign armies; for neither Dionysus, tradition tells us, nor Heracles, nor any other hero or leader made a campaign against it; in our day, however, Gaius Caesar, who has been called a god because of his deeds, was the first man of whom we have record to have conquered the island, and after subduing the Britons he compelled them to pay fixed tributes. But we shall give a detailed account of the events of this conquest in connection with the appropriate period of time (Diodorus never fulfilled his promise. A. Sp.), and at present we shall discuss the island and the tin which is found in it . . .

-
- V, 22. The inhabitants of Britain who dwell about the promontory⁸ known as Belerium* are especially hospitable to strangers and have adopted a civilized manner of life because of their intercourse with merchants of other peoples. They it is who work the tin, treating the bed which bears it in an ingenious manner. This bed, being like rock, contains earthy seams and in them the workers quarry the ore, which they then melt down and cleanse of its impurities. Then they work the tin into pieces the size of knuckle-bones and convey it to an island which lies off Britain⁹ and is called Ictis;** for at the time of ebb-tide the space between this island and the mainland becomes dry, and they can take the tin in large quantities over to the island on their wagons.

* Translator's note: The area of modern Cornwall.

** Translator's note: Almost certainly the present St. Michael's Mount, an island in Mount's Bay, Cornwall.

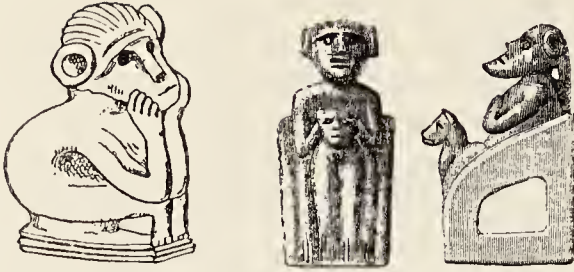
⁸ On Belerion *cf.* Thomson, *op. cit.*, p. 144.

⁹ Thomson, *op. cit.*, p. 145—146 explains this proper name by means of Celtic etymologies.

(And a peculiar thing happens in the case of the neighbour-islands which lie between Europe and Britain, for at flood-tide the passages between them and the mainland run full and they have the appearance of islands, but at ebb-tide the sea recedes and leaves dry a large space, and at that time they look like peninsulas.)¹⁰ On the island of Ictis the merchants purchase the tin of the natives and carry it from there across the Strait to Galatia or Gaul; and, finally, making their way on foot through Gaul for some thirty days, they bring their wares on horseback to the mouth of the river Rhone.

V, 23. But as regards the tin of Britain we shall rest content with what has been said, and we shall now discuss the *electron*, as it is called, or amber. Directly opposite the part of Scythia which lies above Galatia there is an island out in the open sea which is called Basileia. On this island the waves of the sea cast up great quantities of what is known as amber, which is to be seen nowhere else in the inhabited world; and about it many of the ancient writers have composed fanciful tales, such as are altogether difficult to credit and have been refuted by later events. For many poets and historians give the story that Phaethon, the son of Helius, while yet a youth, persuaded his father to retire in his favour from his four-horse chariot for a single day; and when Helius yielded to the request, Phaethon, as he drove the chariot, was unable to keep control of the reins, and the horses, making light of the youth, left their accustomed course; and first they turned aside to traverse the heavens, setting it afire and creating what is now called the Milky Way, and after that brought the scorching rays to many parts of

¹⁰ This passage of Diodorus makes one think of the description of Ravenna, as given by Procopius (6th century A. D.) in his *De Bello Goth.* I, 1: Also there the high and the low tides of the Adriatic Sea in the marshy environments of the Gothic capital of those days were used for defence and for trade purposes, as was usual in ancient times, when in relations with foreign peoples nobody was able to trace a sure frontier line between trade and piracy.



5. Amber figurines from Vetulonia, Italy. 7th century B. C. Actual size. O. Montelius, *La civilisation primitive* . . .

the inhabited earth and burned up not a little land. Consequently Zeus, being indignant because of what had happened, smote Phaethon with a thunderbolt and brought back the sun to its accustomed course. And Phaethon fell to the earth at the mouth of the river which is now known as the Padus (Po), but in ancient times was called the Eridanus, and his sisters vied with each other in bewailing his death and by reason of their exceeding grief underwent a metamorphosis of their nature, becoming poplar trees. And these poplars, at the same season each year, drip tears,* and these when they harden, form what men call amber, which in brilliance excels all else of the same nature and is commonly used in connection with the mourning attending the death of the young. But since the creators of this fictitious tale have one and all erred, and have been refuted by what has transpired at later times, we must give ear to the accounts which are truthful; for the fact is that amber is gathered on the island we have mentioned and is brought by the natives (*ὑπὸ τῶν ἐγγυωτίων*) to the opposite continent, and that it is conveyed through the continent to the regions known to us, as we have stated.

THE GEOGRAPHY OF STRABO (*The Loeb Classical Library*). III, 3.11. The Cassiterides are ten in number, and they lie near each other in the high sea to the north of the port of the Artabrians. One of them is desert, but the rest are inhabited by

* Translator's note: The Greek word in the singular, as here, also means "sap".

people who wear black coats, go clad in tunics that reach to their feet, wear belts around their breasts, walk around with canes, and resemble the goddesses of Vengeance in tragedies. They live off their herds, leading for the most part a nomadic life. As they have mines of tin and lead, they give these metals and the hides from their cattle to the sea-traders in exchange for pottery, salt and copper utensils. Now in former times it was the Phoenicians alone who carried on this commerce (that is, from Gades), for they kept the voyage hidden from every one else. And when once the Romans were closely following a certain ship's captain in order that they too might learn the markets in question, out of jealousy the ship's captain purposely drove his ship out of its course into shoal water; and after he had lured the followers into the same ruin, he himself escaped by a piece of wreckage and received from the State the value of the cargo he had lost. Still, by trying many times, the Romans learned all about the voyage. After Publius Crassus crossed over to these people and saw the metals being dug from only a slight depth, and that the men there were peaceable, he forthwith laid abundant information before all who wished to traffic over this sea, albeit a wider sea than that which separates Britain from the continent. So much, then, for Iberia and the islands that lie off its coast.

PLINY—*The Natural History of Pliny*, Vol. VI—*Bohn's Library* (397—404).

...

Chap. 11.—Amber: The many Falsehoods that have been told about it.

Next in rank among the objects of luxury, we have amber; an article which, for the present, however, is in request among women only. All these three last-mentioned substances hold the same rank, no doubt, as precious stones; the two former for certain fair reasons; crystal, because it is adapted for taking cool drinks, and murrhine vessels, for taking drinks that are either hot or cold. But as for

amber, luxury has not been able, as yet, to devise any justification for the use of it. This is a subject which affords us an excellent opportunity of exposing some of the frivolities and falsehoods of the Greeks; and I beg that my readers will only have patience with me while I do so, it being really worth while, for our own practical improvement, to become acquainted with the marvellous stories which they have promulgated respecting amber.

After Phaethon had been struck by lightning, his sisters, they tell us, became changed into poplars, which every year shed their tears upon the banks of the Eridanus, a river known to us as the "Padus". To these tears was given the name of *electrum*, from the circumstance that the Sun was usually called *elector*. Such is the story, at all events, that is told by many of the poets, the first of whom were, in my opinion, Aeschylus, Philoxenus, Euripides, Satyrus, and Nicander; and the falsity of which is abundantly proved upon the testimony of Italy itself. Those among the Greeks who have devoted more attention to the subject have spoken of certain islands in the Adriatic Sea, known as the *Electrides*, to which the Padus, they say, carries down *electrum*. It is a fact, however, that there never were any islands there so called, nor, indeed, any islands so situated as to allow of the Padus carrying down anything in its course to their shores. As to Aeschylus placing the Eridanus in Iberia, or, in other words, in Spain, and giving it the name of Rhodanus; and as to Euripides and Apollonius representing the Rhodanus and the Padus as discharging themselves by one common mouth on the shores of the Adriatic, we can forgive them all the more readily for knowing nothing about amber when they betray such monstrous ignorance of geography.

Other writers, again, who are more guarded in their assertions, have told us, though with an equal degree of untruthfulness, that, at the extremity of the Adriatic Gulf, upon certain inaccessible rocks, there are certain trees which shed their gum at the rising of the Dog-Star. Theophrastus has stated that amber is extracted from the earth in Liguria; Chares, that Phaethon died in the territory of Hammon, in Aethiopia, where there is a temple of his and



Amber pendants and buttons of the Bronze Age found in the dwellings of the Sārņate swamps, Kurzeme, Latvia. 9th—8th century B. C. Actual size. E. Šturms, *Sārņates purva mītne*.



Amber necklace from a grave at Lahn-Hallstatt, Austria. 6th century B. C. Actual size. F. Morton, *Hallstatt und die Hallstattzeit*. The ancient graves of Hallstatt are very rich in amber, which could reach those regions only as a trade article in exchange for the local salt.

an oracle, and where amber is produced; Philemon, that it is a fossil substance, and that it is found in two different localities in Scythia, in one of which it is of a white and waxy colour, and is known as *electrum*; while in the other it is red, and is called *sualiternicum*. Demostratus calls amber *lyncurion*, and he says that it originates in the urine of the wild beast known as the *lynx*; that voided by the male producing a red and fiery substance, and that by the female an amber of a white and less pronounced colour; he also informs us that by some persons it is called *langurium*, and that in Italy, there are certain wild beasts known as *languri*. Zenothemis, however, calls these wild beasts *langae*, and gives the banks of the river Padus as their locality. Sudines says that it is in reality a tree that produces amber, and that, in Etruria, this tree is known by the name of *lynx*; an opinion which is also adopted by Metrodorus. Sotacus expresses a belief that amber exudes from certain stones in Britannia, to which he gives the name of *electrides*. Pytheas says that the Gutones, a people in Germany, inhabit the shores of an estuary of the Ocean called Mentonomon, their territory extending a distance of six thousand stadia: that, at one day's sail from this territory, is the Isle of Abalus, upon the shores of which amber is thrown up by the waves in spring, it being an excretion of the sea in a concrete form; also, that the inhabitants use this amber by way of fuel, and sell it to their neighbours, the Teutones. Timaeus, too, is of the same belief, but he has given to the island the name of Basilia.

Philemon says that *electrum* does not yield a flame. Nicias, again, will have it, that it is a liquid produced by the rays of the sun; and that these rays, at the moment of the sun's setting, striking with the greatest force upon the surface of the soil, leave upon it an unctuous sweat, which is carried off by the tides of the Ocean, and thrown up upon the shores of Germany. He states, also, that in Egypt it is similarly produced, and is there called *sacal*; that it is found in India, too, where it is held as a preferable substitute for frankincense; and that in Syria the women make the whirls of their spindles of this substance, and give it the name of *harpax*, from the circumstance that it attracts towards it leaves, chaff, and the light fringe of

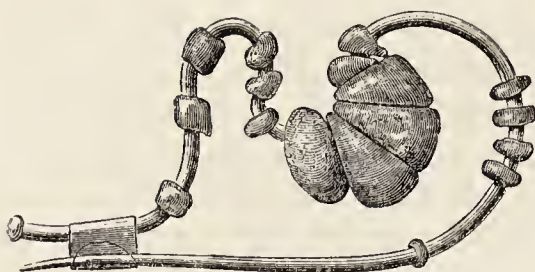
tissues. According to Theochrestus, amber is thrown up by the tides of the Ocean, at the foot of the Pyrenaean range; an opinion adopted also by Xenocrates. Asarubas, who has written the most recently upon these subjects, and is still living, informs us that near the shores of the Atlantic is Lake Cephisis, known to the Mauri by the name of *Electrum*; and that when this lake is dried up by the sun, the slime of it produces amber, which floats upon the surface. Mnaseas speaks of a locality in Africa called Sicyon, and of a river Crathis there, which discharges itself from a lake into the Ocean, the banks of which are frequented by birds which he calls *meleagrides* and *penelopes*; it is here that, according to him, *electrum* is produced, in the manner mentioned above. Theomenes says that near the Greater Syrtis are the Gardens of the Hesperides, and Lake Electrum; on the banks, he says, are poplars, from the summits of which amber falls into the water below, where it is gathered by the maidens of the Hesperides.

Ctesias asserts that there is in India a river called Hypobarus, a word which signifies "bearer of all good things"; that this river flows from the north into the Eastern Ocean, where it discharges itself near a mountain covered with trees which produce *electrum*; and that these trees are called *siptachorae*, the meaning of which is "intense sweetness". Mithridates says that off the shores of Germany there is an island called "Serita", covered with a kind of cedar, from which amber falls upon the rocks. According to Xenocrates, this substance is called, in Italy, not only *succinum*, but *thieum* as well, the Scythian name for it, for there also it is to be found, being *sacrium*;* others, he says, are of opinion that it is a product of Numidia. But the one that has surpassed them all is Sophocles, the tragic poet; a thing that indeed surprises me, when I only consider the surpassing gravity of his lofty style, the high repute that he enjoyed in life, his elevated position by birth in Athens, his various exploits, and his high military command. According to him, amber is produced in the countries beyond India, from the tears that are shed for Meleager, by the birds called *meleagrides*. Who can be

* The Teubner edition puts: a Scythia *vero sacrum*...

otherwise than surprised that he should have believed such a thing as this, or have hoped to persuade others to believe it? What child, too, could possibly be found in such a state of ignorance as to believe that birds weep once a year, that their tears are so prolific as this, or that they go all the way from Greece, where Meleager died, to India to weep? "But then", it will be said, "do not the poets tell many other stories that are quite as fabulous?" Such is the fact, no doubt, but for a person seriously to advance such an absurdity with reference to a thing so common as amber, which is imported every day and so easily proves the mendacity of this assertion, is neither more nor less than to evince a supreme contempt for the opinions of mankind, and to assert with impunity an intolerable falsehood.

There can be no doubt that amber is a product of the islands of the Northern Ocean, and that it is the substance called *glæsum* by the Germans; for which reason the Romans, when Germanicus Caesar commanded the fleet in those parts, gave to one of these islands the name of Glaesaria, which by the barbarians was known as Austeravia. Amber is produced from a marrow discharged by trees belonging to the pine genus, like gum from the cherry, and resin from the ordinary pine. It is a liquid at first, which issues forth in considerable quantities, and is gradually hardened by heat or cold, or else by the action of the sea, when the rise of the tide carries off the fragments from the shores of these islands. At all events, it is thrown up on the coasts, in so light and soluble a form that in the shallows it has all the appearance of hanging suspended in the water. Our forefathers, too, were of opinion that it is the juice of a tree, and for this reason gave it the name of *succinum*; and one great proof that it is the produce of a tree of the pine genus is the fact that it emits a pine-like smell when rubbed, and that it burns, when ignited, with the odour and appearance of torch-pine wood.



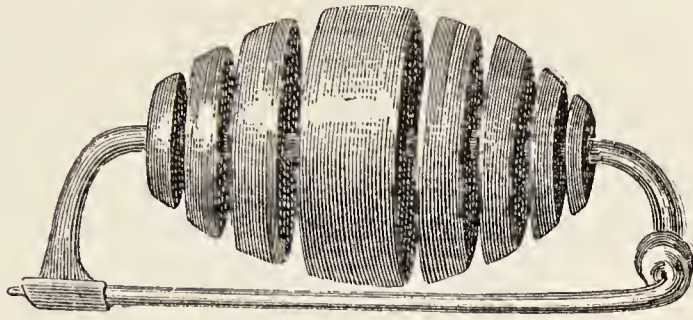
6. Bronze serpentine fibula from the cemetery of Bologna, Italy. 8th century B. C. Actual size. O. Montelius, *Die vorklassische Chronologie* . . . The brooch consists of amber beads arranged on a bronze wire.

Amber is imported by the Germans into Pannonia, more particularly; from whence the Veneti, called by the Greeks Eneti, a people in the vicinity of Pannonia, and dwelling on the shores of the Adriatic Sea, first brought it to general notice. From this it is evident how the story which connects it with the Padus first originated; and at the present day we see the female peasantry in the countries that lie beyond that river wearing necklaces of amber, principally as an ornament, no doubt, but on account of its remedial virtues as well; for amber, it is generally believed, is good for afflictions of the tonsillary glands and fauces, the various kinds of water in the vicinity of the Alps being apt to produce disease in the human throat.

From Carnuntum in Pannonia, to the coasts of Germany from which the amber is brought, is a distance of about six hundred miles, a fact which has only very recently been ascertained; and there is still living a member of the equestrian order, who was sent thither by Julianus, the manager of the gladiatorial exhibitions for the Emperor Nero, to procure a supply of this article. Traversing the coasts of that country and visiting the various markets there, he brought back amber, in such vast quantities as to admit of the nets, which were used for protecting the podium against the wild beasts, being studded with amber.

The arms, the litters, and all the other apparatus, were for one day, decorated, with nothing but amber, a different kind of display being made each day that these spectacles

7. Bronze fibula—perforated amber discs on a bow-shaped bronze wire—from Villa Nova, Italy. 7th century B. C. Actual size. O. Montelius, *La civilisation primitive* . . .



were exhibited. The largest piece of amber that this personage brought to Rome was thirteen pounds in weight.

That amber is found in India, too, is a fact well ascertained. Archelaüs, who reigned over Cappadocia, says that it is brought from that country in the rough state, and with the fine bark still adhering to it, it being the custom there to polish it by boiling it in the grease of a sucking-pig. One great proof that amber must have been originally in a liquid state, is the fact that, owing to its transparency, certain objects are to be seen within it: ants, for example, gnats, and lizards. These, no doubt, must have first adhered to it while it was liquid, and then, upon its hardening, have remained enclosed within.

Chap. 12.—The Several Kinds of Amber: the Remedies Derived from it.

There are several kinds of amber. The white is the one that has the finest odour, but neither this nor the wax-coloured amber is held in very high esteem. The red amber is more highly valued; and still more so, when it is transparent, without presenting too brilliant and igneous an appearance. For amber, to be of a high quality, should present a brightness like that of fire, and not flakes resembling those of flame. The most highly esteemed amber is that known as the "Falernian", from its resemblance to the colour of Falernian wine; it is perfectly transparent, and has a softened, transparent, brightness. Other kinds, again,

are valued for their mellow tints, like the colour of boiled honey in appearance. It ought to be known, however, that any colour can be imparted to amber that may be desired; it is sometimes stained with kid-suet and root of alkanet; indeed, at the present day, amber is even dyed purple. When a vivifying heat has been imparted to it by rubbing it between the fingers, amber will attract chaff, dry leaves, and thin bark, just in the same way as the magnet attracts iron. Pieces of amber, steeped in oil, burn with a more brilliant and more lasting flame than pith or flax.

So highly valued is it as an object of luxury, that a very diminutive human effigy, made of amber, has been known to sell at a higher price than living men even, in stout and vigorous health.

[If so, what do we have to think about the testimony of Pausanias, to be found in his description of Olympia? It runs as follows (V. XII. 7): "Of the statues set up in the round buildings, the amber one represents Augustus, the Roman emperor . . . This amber of which the statue of Augustus is made, when found in the sands of the Eridanus, is very rare and precious to men for many reasons . . ." (*The Loeb Classical Library*. A. Sp.)]

This single ground for censure, however, is far from being sufficient; in Corinthian objects of vertu, it is the copper that recommends them, combined with silver and gold; and in embossed works it is the skill and genius of the artist that is so highly esteemed.

We have already said what it is that recommends vessels of murrhine and of crystal; pearls, too, are of use for wearing upon the head, and gems on the fingers. In the case of all other luxuries, in fact, it is either a spirit of ostentation or some utility that has been discovered in them that pleads so strongly on their behalf; but in the case of amber we have solely the consciousness that we are enjoying

a luxury, and nothing more. Domitius Nero, among the other portentous extravagances of his life, bestowed this name upon the ringlets of his wife Poppaea; and, in certain verses of his, he has even gone so far as to call them *succini*. As fine names, too, are never wanting for bodily defects, a third tint of hair has been introduced of late among our ladies, under the name of "amber-coloured".

...

TACITUS (*Everyman's Library*).

... (311).

- I. The whole vast country of Germany is separated from Gaul, from Rhaetia, and Pannonia, by the Rhine and the Danube; from Dacia and Sarmatia, by a chain of mountains, and, where the mountains subside, mutual dread forms a sufficient barrier. The rest is bounded by the ocean, embracing in its depth of water several spacious bays, and islands of prodigious extent, whose kings and people are now, in some measure, known to us, the progress of our arms having made recent discoveries.

...

... (312). Even at this day the Northern Ocean, vast and boundless, and, as I may say, always at enmity with mariners, is seldom navigated by ships from our quarter of the world. Putting the dangers of a turbulent and unknown sea out of the case, who would leave the softer climes of Asia, Africa, or Italy, to fix his abode in Germany where nature offers nothing but scenes of deformity; where the inclemency of the seasons never relents; where the land presents a dreary region, without form or culture, and, if we except the affection of a native for his mother-country, without an allurements to make life supportable.

...

... (340—343).

XLV. At the further extremity beyond the Suiones¹¹ there is another sea, whose sluggish waters seem to be in a state of stagnation. By this lazy element the globe is said to be encircled, and the supposition receives some colour of probability from an extraordinary phenomenon well known in those regions. The rays of the setting sun continue till the return of day to brighten the hemisphere with so clear a light, that the stars are imperceptible. To this it is added by vulgar credulity, that when the sun begins to rise, the sound of the emerging luminary is distinctly heard, and the very form of the horses, the blaze of glory round the head of the god, is palpable to the sight. The boundaries of nature, it is generally believed, terminate here.

On the coast to the right of the Suevian ocean, the Aestyans have fixed their habitation. In their dress and manners they resemble the Suevians, but their language has more affinity to the dialect of Britain. They worship the mother of the gods. The figure of a wild boar is the symbol of their superstition; and he, who has that emblem about him, thinks himself secure even in the thickest ranks of the enemy, without any need of arms, or any other mode of defence. The use of iron is unknown, and their general weapon is a club (the same is told by Tacitus concerning the Germans, Cap. VI. A. Sp.). In the cultivation of corn, and other fruits of the earth, they labour with more patience than is consistent with the natural laziness of the Germans. Their industry is exerted in another instance; they explore the sea for amber, in their language called *glese*, and are the only people who gather that curious substance. It is generally found among the shallows; sometimes on the shore. Concerning the nature or the causes of this concretion, the Barbarians, with their usual want of curiosity, make no inquiry. Amongst other superfluities discharged by the sea,

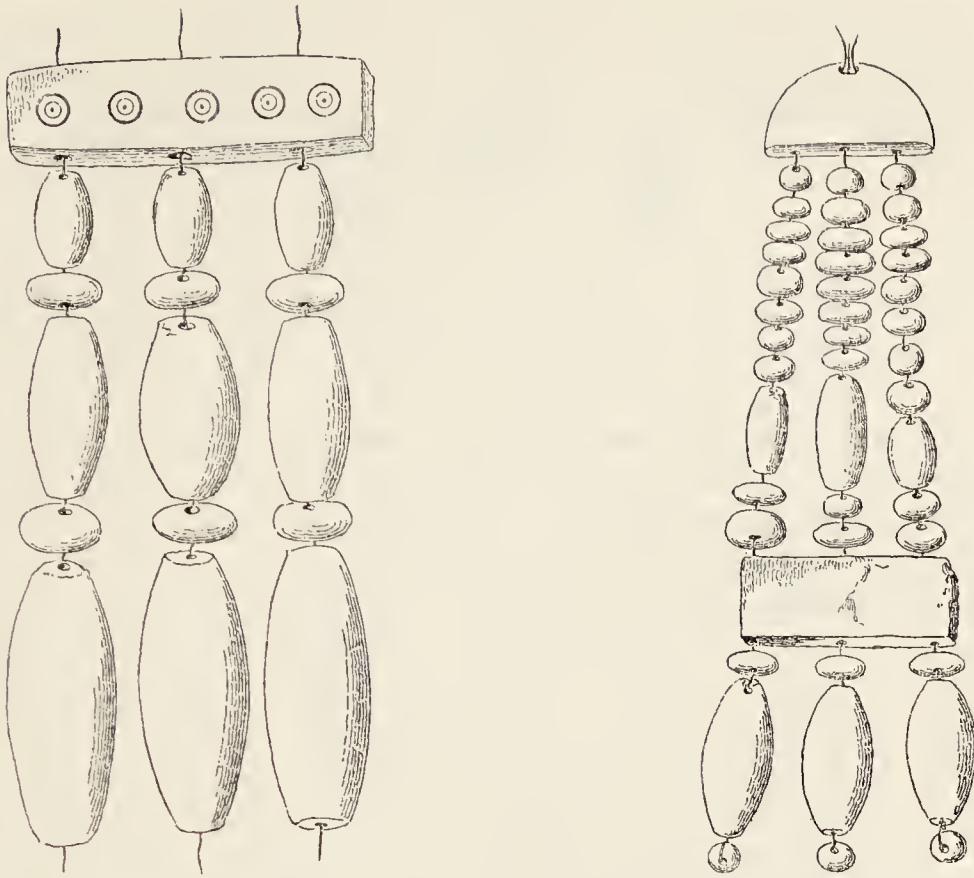
¹¹ The explanation of this ethnical denomination is dubious. Also the *variae lectiones* of the manuscripts are changing.



Amber female masks from Vasto, Italy. 7th century B. C. Actual size. Marconi, *La cultura orientalizzante* . . . Vasto is the place of rich archaeological discoveries of the Early Iron Age of Picena (the Villa Nova period) on the eastern shore of central Italy. The Picena culture of this period is the richest in amber finds throughout Italy. Also a developed amber industry was found here. Amber was held in high esteem because of its medical qualities and mystical powers of protection against evil spirits; therefore even raw amber is often found in ancient tombs. The bow-fibulas, characteristic of those times, often have attached to them pieces of raw amber, some of these pieces weighing up to one kilogram.



Amber lion from Belmonte, Italy. 6th century B. C. Actual size. Marconi, *La cultura orientalizzante* . . . Belmonte is one of the most important localities of archaeological finds of the Picena culture, its tombs being rich in amber. Even here these riches can be explained by the people's belief in the mystical qualities of amber. Up to a hundred fibulas with pieces of raw amber attached to them can be found in a single tomb. Most of the amber ornaments found here are amulets, often of a phallic character, in the shape of pendants. Amber carvings, as the lion reproduced here, show the influence of oriental style.



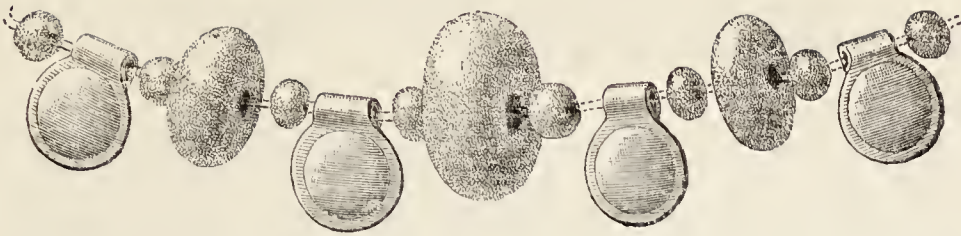
8. Amber pendants from Hallstatt, Austria. 6th century B. C. Actual size. Ed. von Sacken, *Das Gräberfeld von Hallstatt...*

this substance lay long neglected, till Roman luxury gave it a name, and brought it into request. To the savages it is of no use. They gather it in rude heaps, and offer it for sale without any form or polish, wondering at the price they receive for it. There is reason to think that amber is a distillation from certain trees, since in the transparent medium we see a variety of insects, and even animals of the wing, which, being caught in the viscous fluid, are afterwards, when it grows hard, incorporated with it. It is probable, therefore, that as the east has its luxuriant plantations, where balm and frankincense perspire through the

pores of trees, so the continents and islands of the west have their prolific groves, whose juices, fermented by the heat of the sun, dissolve into a liquid matter, which falls into the sea, and, being there condensed, is afterwards discharged by the winds and waves on the opposite shore. If you make an experiment of amber by the application of fire, it kindles, like a torch, emitting a fragrant flame, and in a little time, taking the tenacious nature of pitch or resin. Beyond the *Suiones*,¹² we next find the nation of *Sitones*, differing in nothing from the former, except the tameness with which they suffer a woman to reign over them. Of this people, it is not enough to say, that they have degenerated from civil liberty; they are sunk below slavery itself. At this place ends the territory of the *Suevians*.

XLVI. Whether the *Peucinians*, the *Venedians*, and *Fennians*, are to be accounted *Germans*, or classed with the people of *Sarmatia*, is a point not easy to be determined; though the *Peucinians*, called by some the *Bastarnians*, bear a strong resemblance to the *Germans*. They use the same language; their dress and habitations are the same, and they are equally inured to sloth and filth. Of late, however, in consequence of frequent intermarriages between their leading chieftains and the families of *Sarmatia*, they have been tainted with the manners of that country. The *Venedians* are a counterpart of the *Sarmatians*: like them they lead a wandering life, and support themselves by plunder amidst the woods and mountains that separate the *Peucinians* and the *Fennians*. They are, notwithstanding, to be ascribed to *Germany*, inasmuch as they have settled habitations, know the use of shields, and travel always on foot, remarkable for their swiftness. The *Sarmatians*, on the contrary, live altogether on horseback or in waggons. Nothing can equal the

³² Cf. n. 11. In the recent researches there is to be noticed a tendency towards explanations in the Baltic sense. So, for instance, in the French edition (G. Budé) the *Suiones* become *Balts*, but the *Sitones* *Carelians*.



9. Necklace with amber and glass beads (the small beads are glass) and disc-shaped bronze pendants from Montefortino near Ancevia, Italy. 5th century B. C. Approximately two fifths of actual size. O. Montelius, *La civilisation primitive* . . .

ferocity of the Fennians, nor is there anything so disgusting as their filth and poverty. Without arms, without horses, and without a fixed place of abode, they lead a vagrant life; their food is the common herbage; the skins of beasts their only clothing; and the bare earth their resting-place. For their chief support they depend on their arrows, to which, for want of iron, they prefix a pointed bone. The women follow the chase in company with the men, and claim their share of the prey. To protect their infants from the fury of wild beasts, and the inclemency of the weather, they make a kind of cradle amidst the branches of trees interwoven together, and they know no other expedient. The youth of the country have the same habitation, and amidst the trees old age is rocked to rest. Savage as this way of life may seem, they prefer it to the drudgery of the field, the labour of building, and the painful vicissitudes of hope and fear, which always attend the defence and the acquisition of property. Secure against the passions of men, and fearing nothing from the anger of the gods, they have attained that uncommon state of felicity, in which there is no craving left to form a single wish.

The rest of what I have been able to collect is too much involved in fable, of a colour with the accounts of the Hellusians and the Oxionians, of whom we are told, that they have the human face, with the limbs and bodies of

wild beasts. But reports of this kind, unsupported by proof, I shall leave to the pen of others.

*

The plausibility and merits of Tacitus's story, as far as it concerns the gathering of amber and its trade, will be discussed further. Here, the reader may permit me to make this one general observation. Chapter 45, important with regard to the Aestii's agriculture and gathering of amber, reads in the original as follows: *Frumenta ceterosque fructus patientius, quam pro solita Germanorum inertia laborant. Sed et mare scrutantur, ac soli omnium succinum, quod ipsi Glesum vocant, inter vada atque in ipso litore legunt.* Does not this quotation look to the "naked" eye like a plain and clear statement that the Aestii were very diligent and industrious people? Is it not expressed also by the rhetoric *sed et* (and furthermore), *i.e.*, that despite their remarkable efficiency in agriculture, they still had time to accomplish things that seemed, no doubt, strange to the neighbouring peoples (tribes), namely finding and gathering amber?

Tacitus's remark concerning the affinity of the Aestian language to the language of Britain, *i.e.*, Celtic, has often been misunderstood. Does not this remark simply mean that the phonetic complex of the Old Prussian seemed to the observers, *i.e.*, the Roman merchants, more akin to the sounds of some Celtic dialect heard somewhere in the Empire than the sounds of the speech of some German neighbouring tribe, near the Old Prussian habitat? (*Cf.* C. M. P. Charlesworth, *The Roman Empire*, 1951, pp. 131, 90 and 128).

CHAPTER III

Amber trade and amber routes

In this chapter the reader will come across many quotations and many references to the opinions of learned men, specialists in their particular fields, especially archaeologists. I have no other means of writing this chapter, which is in a way the core of the whole book. But I think there will be no harm in offering the evidence of the latest specialized modern researches to my readers, dwelling in particular on the Golden Age of the Roman Empire, during which era for a rather brief period the amber trade reached its height.

Let us begin with a quotation of wide scope. In Sir Mortimer Wheeler's recently published book we find the following description of the exotic aspect of Rome's foreign trade:¹ "Roman trafficking with lands outside the Empire was founded primarily on the supply of five commodities which were woven into the fabric of Imperial culture, and were essential in one way or another to the Imperial way of life. Free Germany produced the amber which was already an integral part of the equipment of southern Europe before the Empire was born. From tropical Africa, either across the Sahara or by way of the Red Sea, came the ivory of infinite domestic use. Southern Arabia yielded the frankincense which had long been sought by the Pharaohs and the Achaemenids and, with gold and myrrh, was offered at Bethlehem. In Peninsular India grows the abundant pepper which has for more than 2,000 years mitigated the cooking of the Western World. And China had a monopoly of silk until the 6th century A.D. Amber, ivory, incense, pepper, and silk were the mainsprings of Roman long-range trade."

The students of the northern sectors of ancient Europe strive for ever more lucid and all-embracing formulas. The well known Latvian archaeologist, Ed. Šturms, has recently published a synoptic study on the course of the amber trade before the beginning of our era. This monograph, by supplying the non-specialist with a survey along general lines, greatly alleviates his work, since earlier writings

¹ Sir Mortimer Wheeler, *Rome Beyond the Imperial Frontiers*. 1954; p. 176.

on the subject of amber were contradictory and confused. The short article on p. 580 of the *Latvian Encyclopaedia* can also be used as a preliminary survey of the subject. This bygone world of northern Europe with its amber trade opened such a wealth of economic possibilities that the famous Swedish archaeologist, O. Montelius, wrote in 1910:² "The last few decades have doubtless proved to us that the inhabitants of northern Europe, long before the beginning of our era, enjoyed an unusually high degree of civilization. The explanation of this remarkable fact is to be sought in their trade, which, even in very ancient times, was much more important than it has been supposed up to now." Professor Šturms's additions to the De Navarro map (see below) indicate the ancient amber routes in northern Europe as modern archaeology has discovered them.³

The main purpose of this chapter is to find the connecting threads which link the ancient Baltic, *i.e.*, Old Prussian, coast with southern Europe and with its pristine centre—Italy. In following these threads, we will try to capture some vanishing scenes of the life of those days, and to perceive the reason for the appearance of our "corner" of land in the field of vision of that ancient world—unfortunately only for the brief period of a few generations.

Like any other large-scale economic operation, in order to be commercially profitable, the amber trade had to have its economic equivalent; which needed to be considerable, when we take into account the value of amber and the very restricted number of commodities available for trade in those remote days. Already during the Stone Age amber was manufactured into ornaments which had a sacred significance. It was not until the Bronze Age that amber, in its natural form, became a commodity that could be used for large-scale trade with the West and the South. The culture of the Bronze Age in the Baltic regions was due entirely to the amber trade, for this product of nature—unsuitable for any direct practical

² Quoted from J. M. De Navarro, *Prehistoric Routes Between Northern Europe and Italy Defined by the Amber Trade* (The Geographical Journal, Vol. LXVI, No. 6, Dec. 1925).

³ Šturms, *op. cit.*, p. 204.

usage—became the determining factor in the development of civilization along the Baltic shores. The most recent of Estonian historians expresses it thus:⁴ “The poverty of the Estonian Bronze Age culture is not surprising. A similar state of affairs exists in most countries where the primary metals for making bronze, lead and copper, were not discovered. The only exception to this rule among the countries near Estonia was East Prussia, which, although deficient in metal ores, enjoyed a rich Bronze Age culture. She was in a position to obtain these in exchange for her own amber, an article in very great demand in those days. Consequently, East Prussia, together with the Scandinavian countries, became one of the centres from which all the Bronze Age articles found in Estonia were imported.”

The flow of amber from Jutland and Samland toward the South underwent various phases with the passing of time and students of those matters are rather discordant as regards the length and the importance of those phases. According to the chronological table generally accepted, there was a flow of amber in the direction of Italy as early as the Late Stone Age and into the Bronze Age (e.g., amber found in prehistoric lake dwellings, and further afield—the amber beads excavated from the ruins of Mycenae). It is followed by a slackening of trade during the Hallstatt and La Tène periods,⁵ that is to say, during both of the Iron Ages; which is explained by the strong Greek influence in Italy, although the Etruscan tombs constitute an exception, for quite a lot of amber was found there. The Latvian archaeologist Šturms has to add some corrections to the existing chronological formulas which the reader should take into account:⁶ “It was during the time of the Roman Emperors that amber was most widely used for ornaments and jewelry, in the classic countries as well as in north-eastern Germany, and in the land of the Aestii (East Prussia), who shipped the largest quantities of amber to the South precisely during this period. The countries men-

⁴ E. Uustalu, *The History of Estonian People*. 1952; p. 17.

⁵ *Reallexicon der Vorgeschichte*, pp. 439—440, 433 sq.

⁶ Šturms, *op. cit.*, pp. 167, 182 sq., 195 sq., 200—201.

tioned above were superior in their wealth of amber ornaments during the era of the Roman Emperors.”⁷

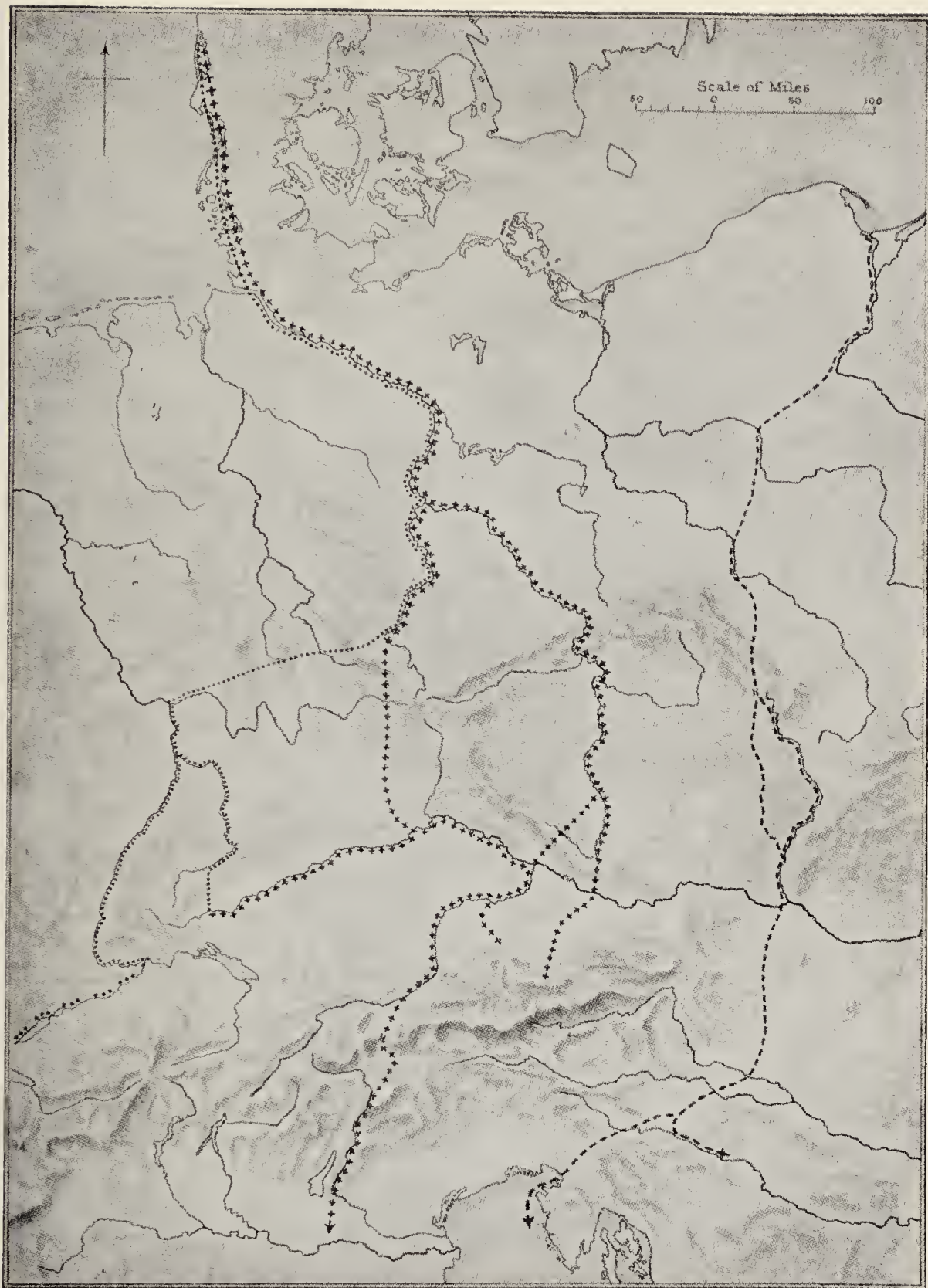
For present day students, thanks to new discoveries and a fresh insight into the past, chronological data has become increasingly sharply defined:⁸ “By far the greatest number of coin-graves has been found north-east of the Gulf of Danzig, in the coast land between the rivers Pregel and Niemen; but they extend southwards to the old border with Poland and Russia, where their apparent cessation may be due merely to lack of research. In some graves the coins were introduced as ornaments, but in others they had been placed between the lips of the dead, the Charon’s fee of the classical world (Charon who ferried souls to the land of the dead, A. Sp.). Save in Samland where more than half of the coins are earlier than 138 A.D., a large majority of them date from 138 to 180 A.D. (the accession of the Emperor Commodus), and in Samland itself of four hoards of *sesterces* three end with Commodus and the fourth with Septimius Severus. The second half of the 2nd century was evidently the optimum period.”

About 30 years ago, Charlesworth wrote:⁹ “The route which conveyed this much prized substance (*i.e.*, the amber) from the shores of the Baltic to the banks of the Danube and over the mountains to Aquileia and the land of the Veneti and the Padus valley was very old indeed, how old it is hard to say; the mouth of the Padus had been for centuries connected with amber and the amber trade in Greek legend and fable; the reign of Augustus brought a clearer knowledge of the route, at any rate, as far as the Danube, and the peace and prosperity of succeeding years produced many who were ready to pay for information. A Roman knight was dispatched to collect amber and explore the trade-route, *etc.*”

The nearer we get to the “golden age” of the amber trade in the Roman Empire, the more information we are able to gather, however confused or casually topical it may be, as may be expected from such an early period. Around the time of the birth of Christ, Roman

⁷ *Reallexicon der Vorgeschichte*, p. 440. ⁸ Wheeler, *op. cit.*, p. 23.

⁹ Charlesworth, *op. cit.*, p. 175—176.



Map. 3. Principal amber trade routes. From J. M. de Navarro, *Prehistoric routes...*

- +++++ the central route
- the western route
- the eastern route

historians have a great deal to say about the German King Maroboduus, for the Roman Emperors and Commanders necessarily played a dangerous game with him. Let us again quote Charlesworth:¹⁰ "... the rivers of the region (the southern part of Pannonia. A. Sp.) were broad and navigable and conveyed much of the merchandise which came from Rome and was destined for the Danube and the East. But for those going northward, the road forked at Emona and crossing a range of hills descended into the valley of the Dravus to the town of Celeia and on to Poetovio. There the level plains of Pannonia received it until the Danube was touched at Carnuntum; this place, which had been selected by Tiberius as the starting point for his invasion of Maroboduus's realm, was subsequently fortified and became the seat of a garrison; it was also the natural centre for all commerce and traffic with Central Germany and the tribes beyond." Indeed, not far from Carnuntum... lay a town, by name Brigetio, where was discovered an inscription dedicated to "the genius of commerce and of our merchants" by some faithful slave of the customs officials stationed there. "The country across the river, vaguely called Boiohaemum and the seat of the Marcomanni, was at the beginning of our era ruled by a man of remarkable ability and organising power, Maroboduus, who had gathered many distant tribes under his sway and built up an army and power which menaced Rome itself; among other measures he allowed the free right of trading to Romans, and many merchants had been lured by this inducement to take up their residence in his capital and carry on business in the surrounding country (*Cf. Tacitus Ann. II, 62. A. Sp.*). Doubtless they sent back to Rome wild beasts for the games and hides of cattle, importing the wine and oil which the savages needed, or the gaudy wares and coloured beads in which they delighted, but besides this one very great motive must have been that by settling along the Danube bank they were enabled to come in contact with the amber trade." And furthermore the author writes: "This knight must have brought back a great deal of information, geographical and otherwise—such as Carnuntum being

¹⁰ Charlesworth, *op. cit.*, p. 174 *sq.*

600 miles from the Baltic—but, unfortunately, none of it has reached us; Tacitus may have used his account, but gives us merely a description of amber-gathering by the natives and none of these details of place and distance which would have been so instructive. Yet there existed a considerable traffic . . .”

Even though in the course of this tale we have dwelt briefly on the German chieftain-king Maroboduus, still we must not link the amber trade too closely with this relatively short period:¹¹ his actions or deeds were only episodes in the development of the amber trade of his times. Furthermore Bohemia itself may have served as an active centre of this trade for a relatively short period in order to see the shifting of this centre to other places (*Cf.* Sir M. Wheeler, *op. cit.*, pp. 75 and 95). What we know of this German King can be used as a working hypothesis for acquiring an insight into what might have been a contact between the countries of the Danube and the Baltic coast. All of this also serves as a somewhat enlightening commentary on the Roman authors quoted in the foregoing chapter.

And so we have gradually come to the central figure of this chapter—to the Roman knight (*equus*) who, at the request of the Roman “businessman” Julianus, travelled to the far-off Baltic coast on a commission to bring back the vast quantities of amber needed for the sanguinary pleasures of Nero’s gladiatorial shows. I would like to refer the reader to J. Carcopino’s book about life in Rome.¹² Pliny’s referent passage has been quoted in the previous chapter, but we have quite a few more recent and witty commentaries on the progress and purpose of this mission. Let us begin with the latest in chronological order, Sir Mortimer Wheeler:¹³ “The pioneering character of this journey implies that previously the northern sectors of the amber traffic had been in unrestricted native hands, and the knight, though primarily concerned, it seems, with the equipment of gladiatorial shows for Nero, may well have been prospecting in-

¹¹ On him *cf.* *Enciclopedia Italiana* or more extensively Pauly’s *Real-Encyclopädie der Classischen Altertumswissenschaft*.

¹² J. Carcopino, *La vie quotidienne à Rome à l’apogée de l’empire*. 1939. English translation 1941, Spanish 1942.

¹³ Wheeler, *op. cit.*, pp. 9, 15, etc.

cidentally with a view to simplifying the trade and reducing its cost. We would give much for a sight of his report." We Balts too, Sir Mortimer!

Tacitus relates, continues the English archaeologist, that there may have been something similar to free trade relations with the Hermunduri tribe along the upper Danube, Thuringa (Germ. 41). The author does not think that this was the only case of free trade, for he writes: "Much later, after the defeat of the insurgent Marcomanni in 173 A.D., Marcus Aurelius established the places and the days for their trading, for these had not been previously fixed (Dio, LXXII, 15)."

The same English student, who translated Pliny's diversely interpreted *commercia* simply as "agencies", says moreover of Pliny's trading nobleman (p. 14—15): "Traffic along this ancient route . . . must have been a matter of constant relay and accumulating dues, and it has been suggested above that the exploratory journey of the knight of Julianus in Nero's reign was in part an attempt to simplify and cheapen the process . . . Roman coins of the 2nd century reached the lips of the dead in the neighbourhood of Königsberg, bronze vessels of the 2nd and 3rd centuries were entombed in the lands south and west of Danzig Bay, and in the 4th and 5th centuries Roman gold bestrewed the Amber Coast and the Swedish islands as token of the new, uneasy partnership of barbarism with the civilized world."

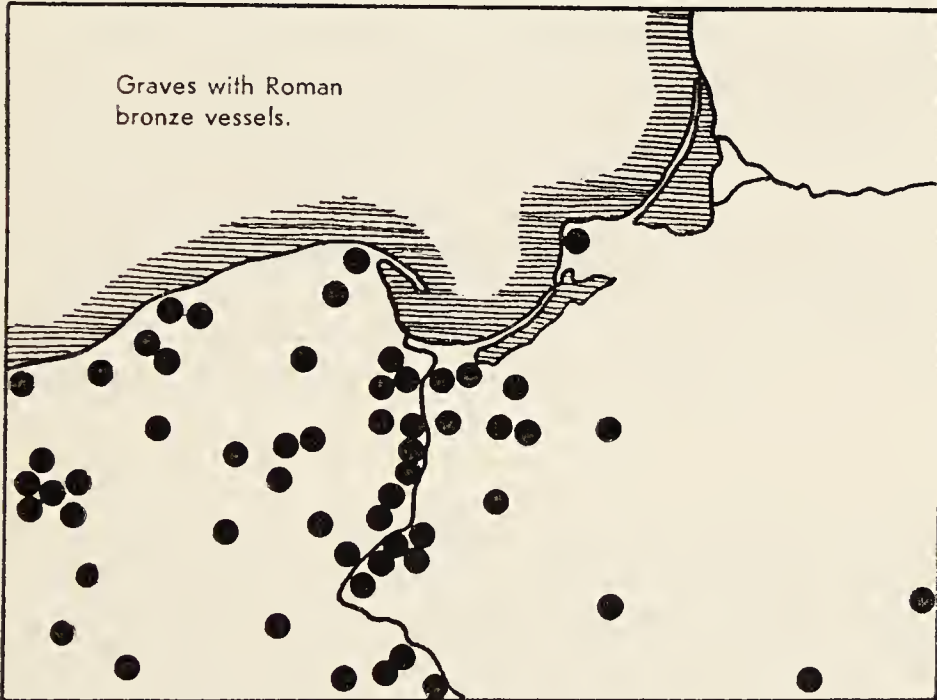
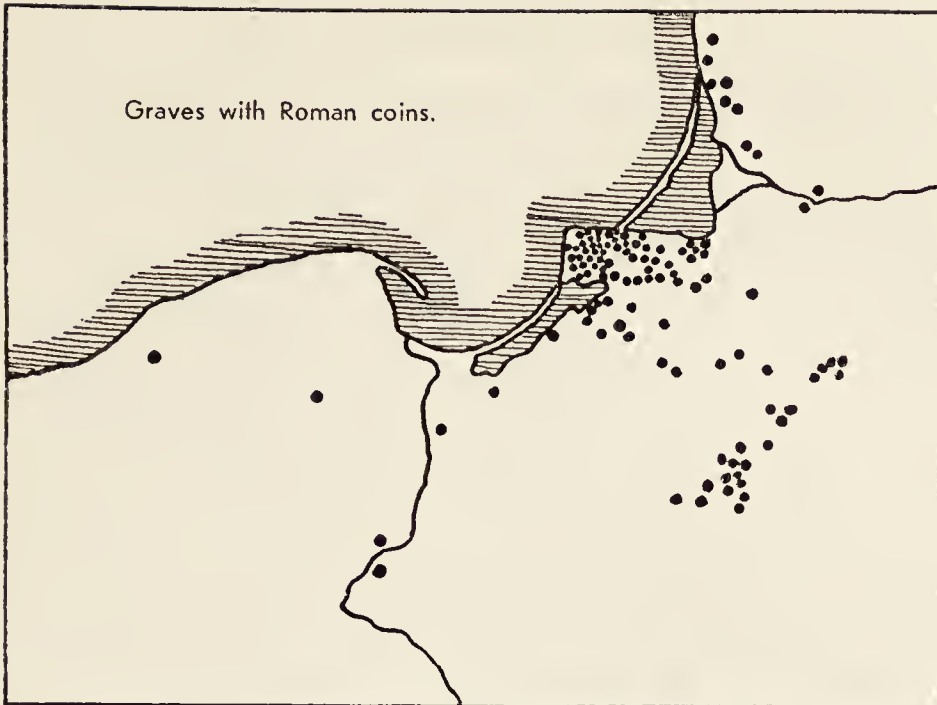
Šturms also has some new observations to make:¹⁴ "(The information about the Roman knight's journey) proves something else as well: his journey was not undertaken for the purpose of exploring any new territory; more than probably he followed already well known routes and was probably directed on his way by guides well acquainted with the localities through which he travelled. Amber trade with Rome must have existed before this journey, and probably began sometime before the birth of Christ . . . Trade relations with the South, starting at first in Samland, soon expanded widely in East Prussia, spreading out from the sea coast naturally, but later reaching

¹⁴ Šturms, *op. cit.*, p. 201.

north to the river Niemen and south as far as Elbing (later the Prussian-Viking Truso, A. Sp.); in time they spread inland, mainly in the direction of West Mazuria. Finally things seem to have arrived at a stage where Samland remained, as in the past, the main source of amber, and the inhabitants of West Mazuria set themselves up as the mediators of the trade." Now let us quote the earlier Hennig:¹⁵ "From the cultural historical point of view it is an extremely significant fact that a trader was able, with reasonable safety, to transport such large quantities of precious amber over the hazardous routes of still barbarous central Europe. We could conclude from this fact that the Roman *equus* was not the first trader to undertake the voyage from the Mediterranean to Samland, and that trade and transport along the so-called Amber Route must have been well organized." (See below.)

It is thus that ever clearer circumstances, possibilities and probabilities emerge concerning this remarkable journey, first mentioned by Pliny, which is termed one of the greatest achievements of Roman trade—with good reason. Sir Mortimer Wheeler adds:¹⁶ "... After Trajan's advance to the Tigris early in the 2nd century... we should ascribe to this period the pioneer mission sent by a Macedonian merchant... to the Stone Tower (Tashkurgan, between Yarkland and Badakshan)... with the journey of Julianus's knight to the Baltic, this enterprise ranks amongst the great adventures of Roman commerce." The same affirmation comes from one of the recent best sellers on ancient history; Paul Hermann's *Conquest by Man*, 1954 (*passim*). Let us strike here, from a purely Baltic angle, a rather sad note: How many were the miles separating our Baltic coast from the shores of the Mediterranean in ancient times, and how long they are still, alas! The Roman knight's journey was and remains an important incident, and is the symbol of a sudden commercial efflorescence, framed chronologically by archaeological excavations, which also marks a new stage in the geographic discovery of the Eastern Baltic.

¹⁵ *op. cit.*, p. 301. ¹⁶ *op. cit.*, p. 155.



Map. 4. Maps showing differential distribution of Roman coins and bronze vessels in the lower Vistula region. After H. J. Eggers, *Der römische Import...*, maps from Sir Mortimer Wheeler, *Rome beyond the Imperial Frontiers*.

The following brief chronological commentary indicates the Roman expansion in northern and eastern Europe:

- 96—93 B.C. P. Licinius Crassus, governor of Spain, tries in vain to find the hidden route to the Cassiterides, or "Tin Islands".
- 75 B.C. Roman military expedition to the middle Danube regions.
- 55—54 B.C. Invasion of Britain by Julius Caesar.
- 15 B.C. Roman military expedition to the source of the Danube and to the Bodensee (Switzerland).
- 12—9 B.C. The expedition of Drusus to the Elbe estuary and to the North Sea—first to reach those shores.
- 7 B.C. Domitius Ahenobarbus (grandfather of Nero) reaches the regions of the Elbe's eastern shore.
- 5 B.C. Attempt by the Roman fleet to reach Scandinavia.
- 5—6 A.D. Agitation among the German tribes between the Elbe and the Rhine. Roman fleet descending by way of the River Elbe attains the shore of Jutland, and all those regions become subject to Roman rule.
- 16 A.D. The Roman fleet at Heligoland (an expedition which ended in disaster).
- 56 A.D. (approximately) The discovery of the Baltic Sea.
- 84 A.D. The voyage of Tacitus's father-in-law, Agricola, to the Orkney Islands.
- 166 A.D. Marcus Aurelius's "embassy" to China.

*

Now I will quote a few observations about the amber route itself, as well as some proofs of its existence. To get a better general view, let us step back in time:¹⁷ "A broad zonal route lay across Europe from the Baltic to the Black Sea, which was marked by the valleys of the Vistula and its tributaries, and the Dniester. This route had long been utilized, since it has been identified as one of the trans-

¹⁷ W. Gordon East, *An Historical Geography of Europe*. 4th ed., 1950; p. 60 sq.

European routes along which amber, collected on the Samland coast to the east of the Vistula estuary, was carried to the Black Sea and the Aegean world. The route outflanks the mountain zone of central Europe, which terminates eastwards with the N.W.-S.E. ranges of the Carpathians;” the Vistula estuary, by the way, in ancient times was placed differently from now, *i.e.*, in the Prussian Sea. The above mentioned route, states the author, is the one followed by the Goths in their march southwards in the first centuries A.D. And further: “The Vistula-Dniester route brought German peoples to the threshold of the Empire in the East. The ‘Moravian Gate’, so-called, offered ingress towards the heart of the Empire. The Moravian Gate is the depression between the Sudeten mountains and the Carpathians, which gives access by way of the valley of the upper Oder to the March or Moravia River, which, in turn, leads directly south to reach the Danube just above Bratislava. The Moravian Gate could be reached not only along the line of the Oder but also from the upper waters of the Vistula, and it affords one of the most marked breaks through the Hercynian mountain system of Europe (ancient term for the central European mountain range. A. Sp.): only a narrow upland neck separates the plain of Silesia from that of Moravia. This route was one of the most ancient trans-continental thoroughfares: the Baltic amber *en route* for Italy is known to have been carried along it in prehistoric times, while in the reign of the Emperor Nero, the route was explored from the March valley to the Vistula estuary.

“The Moravia plain was occupied successively by Celtic and by German peoples (the Boii and Quadi respectively) with whom the Romans traded and fought. The fortress of Carnuntum (now Petronell) on the south bank of the Danube just above the March confluence, with its legionary garrison and its fleet, guarded the Danube against assaults by way of the March valley. (Middle Danube fleets were attached at different times to Carnuntum. G. East, p. 376.) The great importance of this approach can be gauged from its position in relation to Pannonia, the broad plain to the south of the Danube, since this region on which invading movements con-



Amber necklaces and a pendant (ram's head) found in the tombs of the Trebba valley, in the locality of the ancient town of Spina. Approximately 450 B. C. Two thirds of actual size. Photograph from the Archaeological Museum of Ferrara. Spina was an important trade centre, situated in the region of the Po estuary, from the 5th to the 2nd century B. C. The amber finds of the Necropolis of Spina belong to the pale and transparent Baltic type of amber. The find consists mainly of necklaces and pendants. Only one plastic carving has been found there—the ram's head reproduced here.

verged was the anteroom to Italy itself. Carnuntum was destroyed by invading barbarians about 374 A.D.; in consequence, the Roman military headquarters were transferred for a time to Vindobona (now Vienna), which, in turn, fell into the hands of the barbarians. The fall of the Danubian strongholds left the way open into Pannonia and thence across the passes of the eastern Alps into Italy. This was the route followed in turn by the Huns, Ostrogoths and Lombards."¹⁸

I will not write in greater detail about the roads leading from Pannonia to Italy; they have been dealt with in special studies.¹⁹

De Navarro, in his yet unsurpassed study, marks the amber route from Jutland and Samland to Italy, as we can see on the adjoining map. However, this map does not include the route to the Black Sea mentioned above, which has probably been known since the time of Herodotus (see his tale about the wealthy Olbia, IV, 17 and 18, and others). Neither does the map include the prehistoric "amber river", the Rhone, for that route did not lead to Italy. Recently, De Navarro has himself slightly altered the direction of his oldest (Jutland) amber routes, as can be seen from Gordon-East's schematic map;²⁰ but all of these things are removed from our direct line of interest; therefore let us turn our attention to De Navarro's description, of his latest eastern amber route.²¹

The main route of the amber trade "would appear to have passed up the Vistula until, somewhere in the neighbourhood of the first big bend in that river, it turned south-west and crossed the Netze near Nackel, threading its way between the lakes that lie between

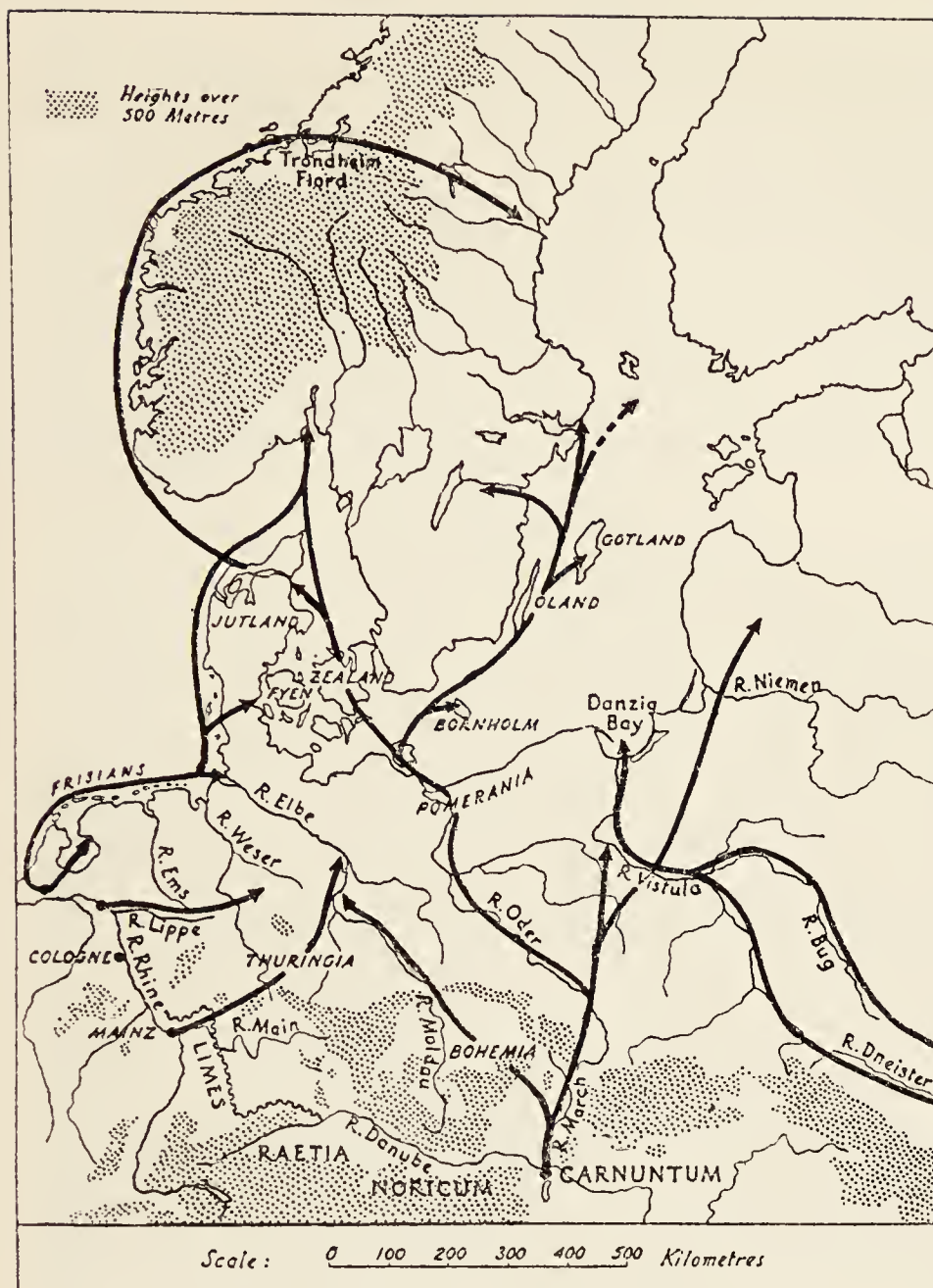
¹⁸ How poor, even recently, have been the connections in the scientific researches between the described magistral route and the amber trade in ancient times, can be seen in the well known books of M. Rostovtzeff, *Iranians and Greeks in South Russia*, 1922, and M. Ebert, *Südrussland im Altertum*, 1921. I shall give only one quotation from the first one, p. 64: "Finally, the Dnieper and the Bug were always great trade routes joining north with south and bringing southward the produce of the north: furs and slaves, perhaps also amber;" cf. also p. 213.

¹⁹ Cf. M. Cary, *The Geographic Background of Greek and Roman History*. 1949; p. 281 sq., with maps.

²⁰ Gordon East, *op. cit.*, p. 61. ²¹ De Navarro, *op. cit.*, p. 496 sq.

that river and the Warthe, it struck the latter stream probably near Obornik. South-west of Obornik lies the Early Iron Age cemetery of Gorszewice . . . The route itself appears to have passed up the Warthe until reaching the Moschin region it struck across South Posen through Zaborowo (another Early Iron Age site where amber occurs in large quantities), possibly reaching the Oder near Glogau. It probably passed up this stream as far as Breslau, where it turned south, eventually crossing the Glatz Pass. This is one of the principal passes over the Sudeten, and it was used in very early times; a trade route running through this defile linked up Silesia with Moravia and Northern Hungary.

“At this point our route seems to have bifurcated, the western branch passing along the picturesque valley of the Zwittawa towards Brno. Somewhat to the north of Brno lies the celebrated cave of Byčiskala, where, along with bronzes of Italian provenance and many other antiquities, over a thousand beads of amber were found. This branch continued south till it reached the river March. The eastern branch, after leaving the Glatz Pass, seems to have reached the upper waters of March and made its way downstream until it rejoined the western branch near Hohenau. Amber has been unearthed at six different sites along the eastern branch. After the junction of the two branches, our route probably continued down the March to where its waters join those of the Danube. Traces of what appears to be an important Hallstatt settlement are to be found on the Braunsberg, a hill on the south bank of the Danube, overlooking the confluence of the two rivers . . . It was on the right bank of the Danube, somewhat west of the confluence of these two rivers that Carnuntum stood; the town which is mentioned by Pliny as having been connected with the amber trade . . . (the author has visited all these spots. Interesting excavations were made in Carnuntum after World War II. A. Sp.) . . . As there was no important route over the Semmering in prehistoric times, it seems probable that amber found its way into Lower Styria and Carniola, *etc.*, by more or less the same direction as that taken by the Roman road in later times, which passed from Petronell-Deutsch-Altenburg (Carnuntum) through



Map 5. Principal European trade routes. From Sir Mortimer Wheeler, *Rome beyond the Imperial Frontiers*.

Sopron (Scarabantia), Szombathely (Sabaria), Pettau (Petavonium), and Cilli (Celeia) . . .

“From Cilli this route entered Carniola. During the whole pre-historic period no region appears to have been richer in amber antiquities than Carniola. In a single tumulus, near Sankt Marein, ten thousand beads were discovered. (Further on the author talks of the road’s bifurcation in the direction of Bosnia. In the neighbourhood of Venice, the author found no amber and wonders whether the marsh land could be accountable for this.) In view of this, I suggest that East Baltic amber, on arriving in the region of Trieste, was shipped across the Adriatic to Italy.”

So much for De Navarro’s narrative.

For the sake of clarity, however, we must mention a few more facts and testimonies, which give infallible proof even today of the existence of the amber routes and of the range of this traffic.

Šturms says:²² “De Navarro’s studies regarding the localities of the amber deposits, in Hallstatt’s period from Danzig to the Adriatic Sea, have also established the direction of the amber routes. Conclusions based on such arguments appear questionable. But ethnographic observations have proved (he quotes the sources, A. Sp.) that long distance trade was undertaken by travelling companies (*Reisegesellschaften*), whose itinerary was decided by the inhabitants of the provinces through which they travelled. The merchants had to pay duty on the goods they transported through the various provinces the whole length of the journey. Consequently, De Navarro’s method of deduction seems the only right and possible one.” Gordon-Childe states roughly the same:²³ “The distribution of the industry’s products was effected by a regular class of itinerant-merchant-artificers. Their routes are defined by hoards of finished and half-finished articles—the merchant’s stock in trade that had been buried when danger threatened and was not recovered . . . They dealt also in amber, gold and presumably substances such as salt, that leave no trace in the archaeological record. The amber routes are particularly well defined.” And: “To obtain metal for rearmament the

²² Šturms, *op. cit.*, p. 192. ²³ Gordon Childe, *op. cit.*, p. 114.

northerners had to rely chiefly on the export of amber." The amber routes, and perhaps they only, have the advantage of a material proof of their existence; there can be no tangible remains of the ancient salt and fur routes (the latter are mentioned by Herodotus, IV, 24, and others), nor of the more recent silk and tea routes.

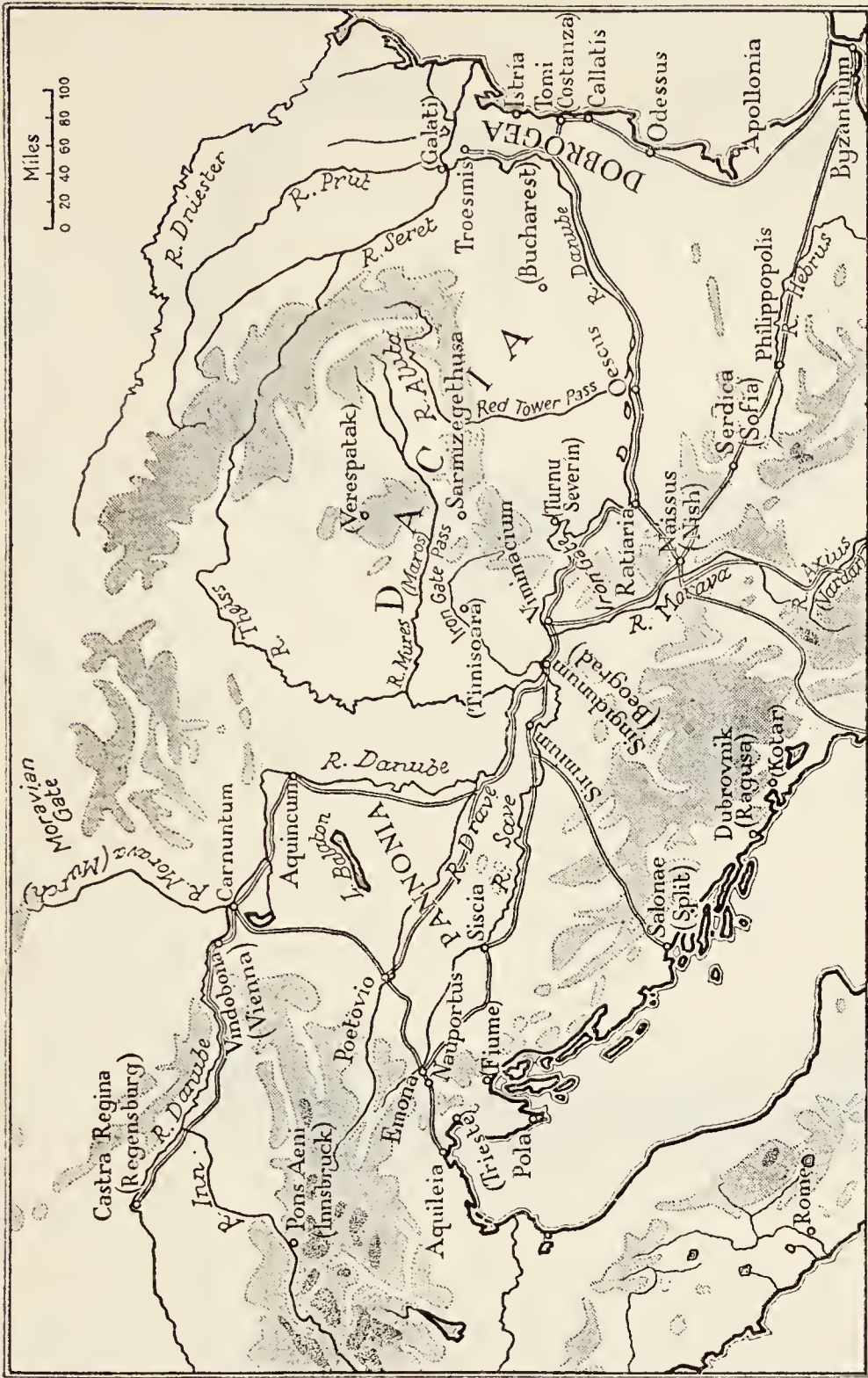
From De Navarro's long quotation, we have seen that the main proof is the amber deposits. There is no need, nor is it within my field of knowledge, to enumerate the large number of them found in the neighbourhood of the amber routes. It will suffice to mention a few of these deposits as Andrée does.²⁴

- 1867. On the coast of Samland were found 50 litres of small amber remains.
- 1900. Near Danzig, approximately 9 kg. of rough amber.
- 1924. In the Heiligenbeil district were found 300 kg. and soon afterwards, 1 200 kg. near Breslau.
- 1936. During the construction of the Breslau-Hartlieb road, two amber deposits were found, of 550 and 1 200 kgs. respectively, of which the largest pieces weighed about 0.7 and 1.75 kgs. These discoveries were mentioned also by Šturms. More data is to be found in various studies.

We must not forget to mention one more way of proving the existence of the ancient amber routes. There are the marsh bridges, one of which is mentioned by the merchant-traveller Ibrahim-ibn-Jakub (10th century A.D.), as he described the route towards Prague. The two bridges with which we are concerned, in East Prussia,²⁵ "were directly south of an arm of the *Frisches Haff*, named *Drausensee*, in ancient times of a more vast extent, near Elbing [a famous Viking colony in later centuries, A. Sp.]. These bridges, discovered in the Sorge valley at the end of the last century, were described by Conventz in 1897 as having spanned the marshy valley of the river Sorge, north of Krisburg and near Baumgart in the

²⁴ K. Andrée, *Bernstein und seine Bedeutung . . .*, p. 89—91.

²⁵ K. Andrée, *op. cit.*, p. 106—107.



Map 6. Amber route through the Middle Danube lands. From M. Cary, *The Geographic Background* . . .



Amber necklace with pendants from Rucava, western Latvia. Approximately 300 A. D. Two fifths of actual size. E. Wahle, *Die Ausgrabungen in Rutzau...* A typical example of amber necklace worn by the Kurish women of that period.



Amber necklace from Kara-Agač, Kasakstan. Actual size. 4th century A. D. A. V. Schmidt, *Kačka. Beiträge zur Erforschung der Kulturen Ostrusslands...* This amber necklace was found in a rich woman's grave together with a golden diadem and other golden ornaments worked in the Sarmatian-Goth style. Amber may have reached this far-off region of the Kirghizian steppes from southern Russia, where amber is often found among the finds of Sarmatian-Goth and, later, Hun ornaments.

district of Stum. The length of one of these bridges was 1,230 metres and the other, smaller one, was 640 metres. These marsh bridges consisted of layers of wood, the base of which was a layer of branches overlaid with beams, superimposed in turn by half beams and fastened together with pegs. When, in the course of time, it became necessary to elevate them, this was done with the same structural technique; in some places there are as many as six layers. They were secured on the sides with poles to prevent their inclination or collapse. Although these bridges cannot be identified positively as having been built during the La Tène period, it is very likely that they came into being from the Vistula regions to Samland during the time of the fast developing amber trade . . .

Another point of interest is where the trade route crossed the river Pregel near Königsberg. The antiquity of this once inhabited spot is indicated by the Old Prussian castle, built to insure the safety of the river crossing on the site of the present State Bank, next to the Teutonic Order's castle. In fact, the funnel-shaped marshy shores of the Pregel made the building of the castle possible only in that spot in the western part of the town. For a long way eastwards from the town of Königsberg, there is no site in the broad Pregel valley so favourable as this. The Old Prussian castle was situated at the spot where the Pregel is split into two narrower streams by an island, today called Kneiphof. There is no possible doubt that the reason for building this castle was the desire to protect the amber route at the point where it crossed the river."

To save the reader from the necessity of looking up the chronology of the ancient civilizations, I will give the most important data here.

- (1) The so-called Hallstatt period of the Iron Age is usually calculated to extend from 800 to 400 B.C.
- (2) The La Tène period of the Iron Age—from 400 B.C. to the beginning of our era.

De Navarro's chronological data,²⁶ as applied to Eastern Europe, where the cultural developments are generally slower, slightly differ

²⁶ *op. cit.*, p. 503.

from those just mentioned: he puts the Hallstatt period from 1000 to 500 B.C., the La Tène period from 500 to 1 B.C.

*

As a small appendix to this chapter it may be useful to mention the silk trade in Rome, and interesting to glimpse the social life of that ancient world centre. The coming of the real China silk and of its Middle Asiatic surrogate to Rome is chronologically rather well defined. Silk makes its appearance in Latin literature around the end of the last century B.C. (Horace, Ovid, *cf.* also Virgil's naive descriptions of the growing of silk *etc.*). Knowledge of silk increased during the first century A.D., about the time of the big influx of amber. There is no need to discuss here the silk routes and silk trade, which have already been dealt with in numerous monographs—only one thing must be stressed. Several times the *Inscriptions* referred to the silk merchants as *sericarii* or *negotiatores sericarii*. Does this not remind us of the *eques Romanus*? Would not the designation *negotiator succinarius* have fitted him well?

The best way to gather knowledge regarding the unrestrained indulgence and material magnificence in which the privileged classes luxuriated in Imperial Rome, is to glance through one of the best known histories of Roman culture—for instance the old Friedländer or the recent Carcopino. One has only to consider Catullus's passionate lyrical lamentations on the moral downfall of his once adored Lesbia and her indecorous conduct in the fashionable seaside resort of Baiae (near Naples); or Horace's scornful remarks concerning the capitulation of Rome's resplendent youth to the charms of the *demimonde*; or Seneca's theatrical gloom and Martial's caustic epigrams, to get some conception of the social environment of the time, in which the extravagantly dear and exotic silk was eminently suitable to their mode of living. Then we can also understand the Emperor-philosopher Marcus Aurelius's expressions of sorrow in this respect. In Pauly-Wissowa's *Encyclopaedia* we find the following

description: . . . wegen ihrer Feinheit und Leichtigkeit waren sie (die Seidenstoffe) besonders beliebt, zumal bei Hetären . . . (those silk clothes) trugen auch die Männer, wenn auch mehr weiche . . . besonders frönten die Kaiser diesem Luxus . . . Verbote, wie unter Tiberius . . . waren vorübergehend.²⁷

²⁷ Pauly, Enc. "Serica".

CHAPTER IV

Geographical discovery of the Eastern Baltic

As an introduction to this chapter, let us take a quotation from Humboldt, written more than a hundred years ago:¹ "The amber trade, which in the beginning was evidently directed towards the Cimbri coast (*i.e.*, Denmark and Schleswig-Holstein) but later towards the Baltic Sea, land of the Aestii, owes its successes to the daring and endurance of the Phoenician navigators (*Küstenfabrer*). With its subsequent development this commerce created a noteworthy precedent in the history of the world's discovery, by showing us how love for one single product of a foreign land can incite relations and discoveries among peoples and further the exploration of far away lands. In the same way as the inhabitants of Massilia (originating from Phocaea in Asia Minor) bore British tin across the whole of ancient Gaul, so amber, travelling from country to country, through Germany and the Celtic regions, reached the declivities of the Alps and even the river Po, and, through Pannonia, the river Dnieper. So it was that this continental traffic established trade relations for the first time between the Northern (Unknown) Ocean, the Adriatic and the Black Seas."

From Strabo to Ptolemy there is a gap of about 200 years: during this period there were five authors who surmise, mention and finally describe the shores of the remote Northern Ocean, which some day would come to be known as the Baltic Sea. These five authors were Strabo, Pomponius Mela, Pliny the Elder, Tacitus and Ptolemy. Placing them chronologically: (1) second half of the first century B.C.; (2) his book was written about 43 A.D.; (3) lived from 23 to 79 A.D.; (4) lived from 55? to 117? A.D.; (5) was well known around the middle of the 2nd century A.D.

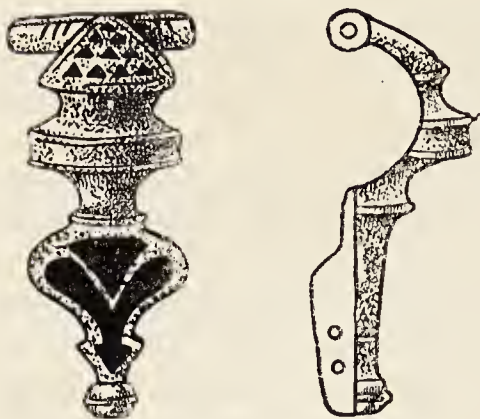
Two Greeks and three Romans, all outstanding, even famous men, with the exception of the less well known "Spaniard" Mela, all living within one or two generations of one another; a circumstance of

¹ A. v. Humboldt, *Kosmos* II (1847), p. 163.

great value since it coincided with the amber trade of East Prussia—the newly discovered land of the Aestii—at a time when this trade with Italy was at its peak. It is a strange and unique accumulation of geographical news—the first emergence of the mysterious shores of the Northern Ocean from the mists of prehistory into the light of Mediterranean culture—a light resembling the first pale streaks of dawn. Such wonderful tales of the ways of early humanity must be unravelled with great care and solicitude, for only then can the dim horizons of our Baltic shores unfold before our eyes.

The early men of our land, clad in bronze armour and bearing bronze arms, remained without the magic touch of Clio (muse of history)—although we can observe the Bronze Age life in the ancient Irish epics. The Age of “ruthless iron” (Ovid) slowly revealed our shores to humanity . . . but soon after, beginning with the 3rd century A.D. (catastrophic to the Roman Empire) they were shut off again for many centuries to come, by a curtain of intellectual darkness and strange legends.

Let us begin our tale with the clever and arrogant Strabo, who was the author of the ancient world’s first encyclopaedia, and well aware of his powers, calls it *κολοσσοουργία* (colossal work) (I 23, 14). In his famous passage about the lands on the other shore of the Elbe, he sounds very categorical (VII, 4); “we know nothing about them” (*παντάπασιν ἄγνωστα ἡμῖν*). However let us not take this too literally. The homeland of this learned man was Asia Minor, and news of the remote northern shores must have come to him mainly through books, which in those days were rare and used only by a very restricted circle. We must remember the strange fate of his own geography. Thus I think that by “nothing” he meant rather the lack of knowledge of any existing treatise by an outstanding traveller or author. His scornful attitude towards Pytheas, as some students are inclined to think, may have been because of the unusual, even fantastic, character of the news brought back to his native Massilia by this explorer of great daring. Very probably some intellectually poorer spirit, let us say some enterprising merchant, had contacted, either in Bohemia or Pannonia, or in the Moravia

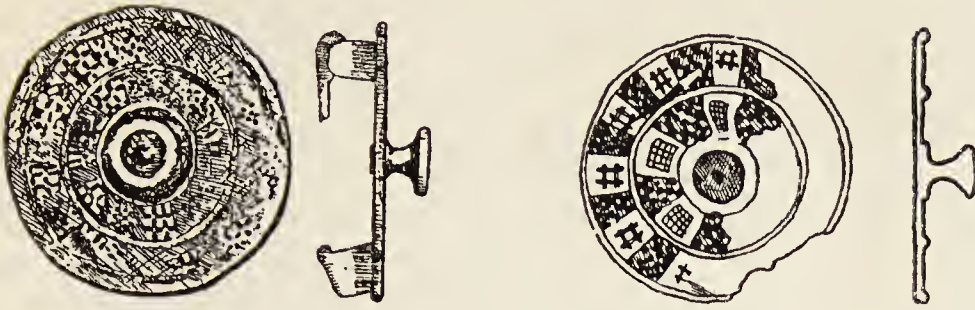


10. Bronze bow-shaped brooch with yellow and green enamel inlay from Kapsēda, western Latvia. 1st-2nd century A. D. Actual size. H. Moora, *Die Eisenzeit in Lettland* . . . Similar brooches in different styles have been found in every province of the Roman Empire. The Kapsēda brooch is believed to have been made in some workshop on the Rhine and has probably found its way into Kursa in connection with the amber trade.

valley, the people who sold East-Prussian amber, and heard some news of the far-off northern shores and of the people who gathered the amber and sold it to their neighbours. Let us not forget the courageous persistence of the Roman merchants in pushing themselves beyond the boundaries of the Roman Empire, as both Charlesworth and Wheeler have described so vividly in their books.

Reading over Strabo's text, we can attempt a chronological calculation which may lead to greater clarity. As Pliny writes, the exploring *eques* was still living. He must have been an old man and the word *vivitque* seems to confirm it. The Emperor Nero reigned from 54 to 68 A.D., and his wife, the notorious Poppaea,² as well as Nero himself must have passed on to another world by the time Pliny's text was written, as can be deduced from some of the passages in the text where Nero is referred to as being deceased. In conclusion, it turns out that the northern journey of the *eques* must have taken place in the first or second decade of the second half of the 1st century A.D. There are students who profess to be able to name the exact date of this journey, but I can find no precise proof of such an assertion. According to my own calculation, the *eques* was born

² In Pauly's *Encyclopædia* there is an entire tale about the famous lady. In 58 A. D. she becomes the mistress of Emperor Nero. Stepping over corpses (mother and wife of Nero, and other "superfluous" persons), she becomes Empress in 62 A. D. She died in 65 A. D. after a miscarriage caused by a kick from Nero.



11. Bronze plate brooches with enamel inlay and glass mosaic from Piltene, western Latvia (left) and from the ancient graves at Īle, Latvia (right). The first brooch is adorned with black-yellow-blue-red enamel inlay and glass mosaic; the second with black-red-white enamel inlay and glass mosaic. 2nd-3rd century A. D. Actual size. H. Moora, *Die Eisenzeit in Lettland* . . . Similar brooches have been found in every province of the Roman Empire and in their neighbouring countries from western Europe to the Caucasus in the east.

within the first decades of our era. Strabo's work was already finished many years before he came to this world (according to Thomson it was finished about 7 B.C., p. 244). In other words, confronting the texts of Strabo and Pliny, we have to calculate a chronological period of about two generations. So that Pliny's *nuper* (a short while ago) assumes greater relief, and the new turn taken by Samland's amber traffic with Rome becomes clearer.

But there is another line of argument, which will give emphasis to the idea which we are pursuing in connection with Strabo's text. By this I mean the proper names of rivers, cities, *etc.*, all along the amber route from East Prussia to the shores of the Adriatic; some of those names are to be found on the above, reproduced Ptolemy's map. "Until Strabo and Pomponius Mela, including the latter (the last three words contradict our further statements about Mela. A. Sp.), we do not find the slightest reliable indication of the existence of the Baltic Sea. Not until the reign of Nero did its southern shores become known to the Greco-Roman world. However, several rivers of these regions were known by name earlier; certainly the Vistula, which shortly after the birth of Christ was shown by

Agrippa on the map of the known world which he compiled at the request of Augustus. This river is also mentioned by P. Mela in 42 A.D., which is not surprising since the Vistula was of paramount importance to the eastern amber route and appears in ancient texts roughly half a century before the River Oder. Although this latter river was situated nearer the confines of the Roman Empire, only Ptolemy mentioned it for the first time, under the name of Viadua. Even the small River Pregel is probably mentioned before the Oder, as Pliny obviously refers to it when he speaks of the river Guthalus (4.100: *Amnes clarissimi in oceanum defluunt Guthalus, Visulus sive Vistla, Albis, Visurgis . . .*) As it flows past the amber country, the fact is not surprising." And in another passage: "Among the place names of the amber route the surest seems to be Kalisz (Calisia). The following are a little more doubtful: *Carcodunum*—Krakau, *Eburnum*—Olmütz, *Arsiona*—Brünn."³ Further on we read about the sea which freezes over, and further still comes the "unresolvable tangle" of Pliny's place names.

I think we would be right in trying to enclose these minor facts within the wider compass of Strabo's universal geographic vision, as far as the shores of the Northern Ocean are concerned. In other words, let us mention also his attitude towards geographic legends. He belongs, as we know, to those sharp-witted and critical authors who do not allow themselves to be fettered by the slogans of their times. He does his best to be mercilessly clear-sighted in examining the themes of these legends, but the horizons of his intellectual tradition are only such as they could be in those days, and therefore often overrule his critical sense. He shortly and sharply terms the monsters of the geographic legends "wondrous inventions" (*teratologeîn*, VII, 36), but nevertheless cites them in great numbers from the tales of Hesiod, Aeschylus and others: "and countless others" as he scornfully adds. "There are even authors," he continues ironically, "who try to find a homeland for the Hesperides, the Rhipaeian mountains", *etc.* Of the latter he says: (see his "quip" against Herodotus's Hyperboreans, I. 3.22, or the blessed of Simon-

³ Hennig, *op. cit.*, I, p. 298—299.



Roman coins found in the district of Daugavpils, eastern Latvia. Fr. Balodis and R. Šnore, *Latviešu kultūra senatnē*. This find comprises 34 copper coins dating from the time of Augustus to the reign of Constantine the Great. In all, 120 coins have been found in Latvian soil, including 26 silver denarii. Nearly half of this amount has been found in the ancient graves, mostly in western Latvia (Rucava and Klaipēda). No Roman coins have been discovered in the graves of the Semigalli and the Letgalli, probably because they did not practice burying coins with their dead. These coins found their way into Latvia from East Prussia which, on account of the amber trade, is very rich in Roman coins and other archaeological finds. The finds of Roman coins in localities near the river Daugava, as for instance at Daugavpils, point to another route by which these coins may have reached Latvia: the Dnieper—Daugava route.



Roman clay oil-lamp from Kapsēda, western Latvia. 1st-2nd century A. D. Actual size. V. Ģinters, *Romas imports...* The only object of pottery from the northern shores of the Black Sea or some province of the Roman Empire on the Danube found in Latvia.

ides and Pindar XV. 1.57): "Owing to the ignorance of places (*i.e.*, in Germany and above the Danube. A. Sp.) it has come to pass that we heard tales of the Rhipaean mountains and of Hyperboreans, and of all the inventions of Pytheas of Massilia, about things he has seen on the shores of the Ocean . . . We will reject all this (VII. 3.1)."

But with all his rationalistic severity, even Strabo has his flaws. In his eyes, the best geographical authority is Homer, the founder of geography in his opinion, and therefore all the legends of the heroic period of Greece become to him the indisputable historic past (I. 2.38 & 45).

*

In scientific literature P. Mela does not have a famous reputation. Some students call him an author of scholastic books, some a feeble transcriber of Greek models, others compiler, *etc.* Of course one notes the difference when reading his little treatise and remembers the works of such men as Eratosthenes, Polybius, Strabo and others of their size. To quote Thomson:⁴ "What he gives us is an outline in three very short and sketchy books. It is bad work . . . He uses obsolete sources, and quite uncritically . . . As reflecting the new knowledge of his own time he is of little use except for the first obscure mention of the Baltic waters." This is important to us. (3.31)⁵ . . . "above the Elbe is situated the Bay of Codanus, full of large and small islands (then follows an odd description of these waters. A. Sp.) . . . On its shores live the Cimbri and the Teutons and beyond them the last of German—hermioni" . . . (3.54): "In this bay, which we call Codanus, is Scandinavia, inhabited up to now by the Teutons, and it is prominent among the other islands because of its greater size and the fertility of its land." The famous Fridtjof

⁴ *op. cit.*, p. 225—226.

⁵ Those few words: *magnis parvisque insulis refertus*, repeated by Adam of Bremen (11th century A.D.), were with his care introduced into many chronicles and geographical texts of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, always in connection with the Baltic Sea.

Nansen⁶ has written an exhaustive commentary on this theme and on the two name places—Mela's *Scadinavia* and Pliny's *Scatinavia*. We must note also the mention of the Vistula (3.33) followed by an obscure account of nomadic life. From the geographical point of view, that is all. Instead, the number of legends now increase (see Chap. V), among them, the Electrides islands of the Adriatic (2.114). There is also the explanation, characteristic of the time, that the Danube and the Hister are one and the same river.

To give greater relief in our minds to the almost sudden appearance of Danzig Bay, let us take into account Sir Mortimer Wheeler's dates and illustrations of the influx of Roman products into the regions of the Vistula valley.⁷ We shall note the sudden appearance of these regions within the field of vision of Roman geographers and take it to mean some quickening of the normal course of the amber trade.

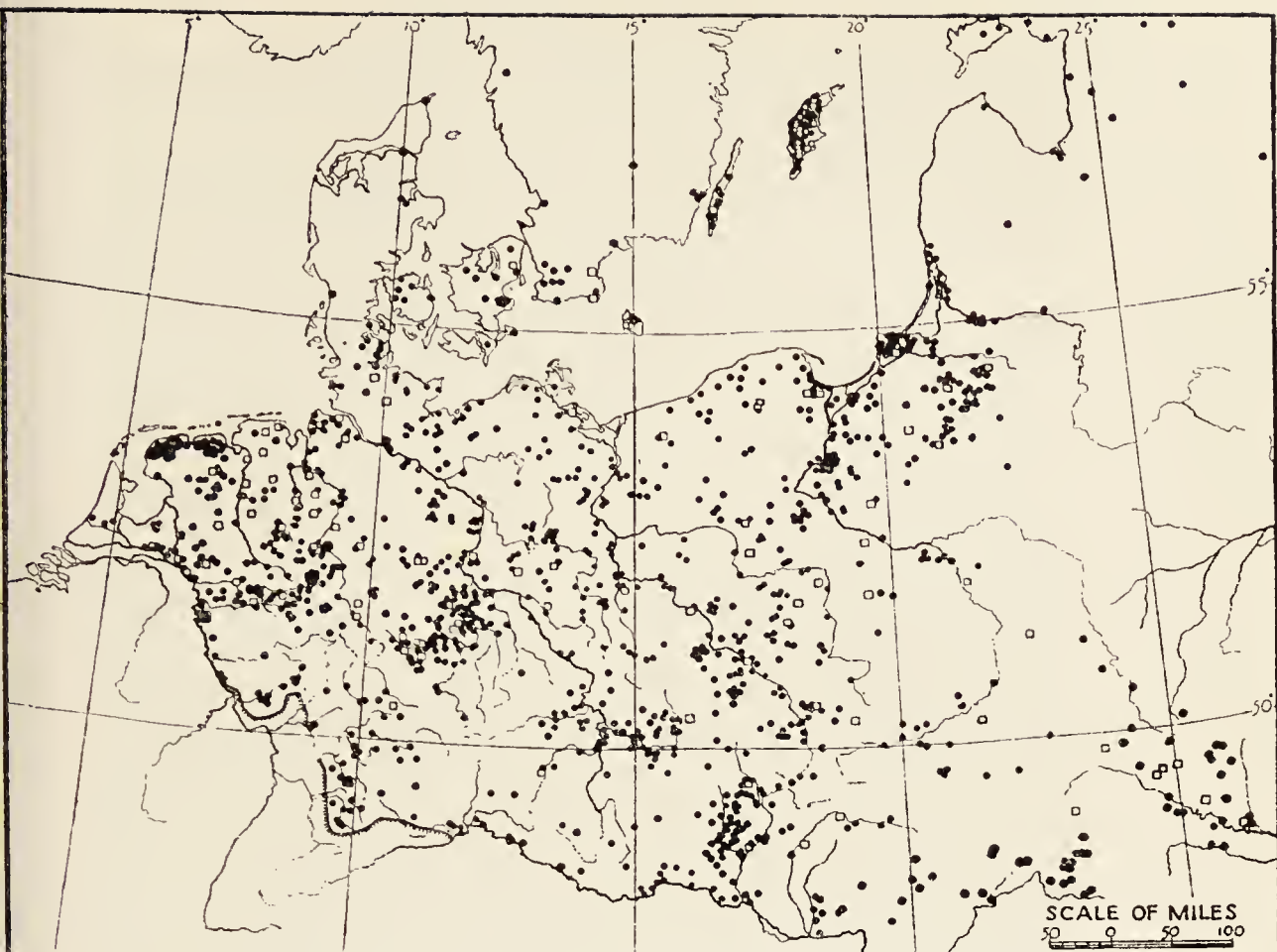
Let us leave Mela, thanking him at least for his general description of the discus-world (first three chapters) and also for his, shall we say, respect for the sea surrounding this discus. Should anyone desire to read the general views of the classical world on the so-called *Oikoumene*, expressed in simple language, I should like to refer him to the chapters mentioned above.

*

There is an often quoted letter by Pliny the Younger (62—113 A.D.) in which he describes a working day of his uncle, Pliny the Elder, especially his method of writing his encyclopaedia. There are also a number of modern students who like to have a laugh at the expense of the old admiral's uncritical, sometimes confused way of writing, and of his manner of using sources. The biggest reproach addressed to Pliny, and with good reason, is his use of place names. No one who has ever scanned, I do not say read, his text, has ever

⁶ Quoted from his *Nebelheim*, I, pp. 95—100, 105—109. The title of the English version is, as follows: Fridtjof Nansen, *In Northern Mists; Arctic Exploration in Early Times*, I—II, 1911. For the *variæ lectiones* cf. Pliny IV, 96 and VIII, 39.

⁷ *op. cit.*, p. 29.



Map 7. Distribution of Roman coins in Free Germany prior to 250 A. D. From O. Brogan, *Trade between the Roman Empire and the Free Germans.*

got through this "jungle", and probably will not do so in the near future. This is partly true also of his quotations regarding the Baltic. Be that as it may, Pliny recorded the first information about these regions and tells how the Baltic amber travelled to Rome, that ancient world centre. Let us be grateful to him, for his tale makes many things appear to us, so to speak, in an amber light.

Nearly all the passages in Pliny's work which refer to our regions either as news or legends are quoted or mentioned in this book. It is not however, a complete summary with full details, since there is no room for a special monograph on Pliny. No doubt there would be more information about the northern regions if we had access to Pliny's lost book on Germany. But even the material contained in his *Naturalis Historia* is of such importance that we can detect, through the prism of Pliny's text, a considerable interest in the legendary North shown by the society of his day, when it was suddenly revealed to them by the expansion of the amber trade. How else can we explain Pliny's long tale of the history and value of this "metal", a real dissertation both in its approach and its construction? And after all we have to read in this book, what reason is there to look for other explanations? In this respect, as in the whole of Pliny's work, there are many contradictions and obscurities which have been and always will be the fate of eclectic works. There is no point in underlining these discrepancies, which are often explained by the fact that his sources were in themselves contradictory. But to throw an all embracing glance over Pliny's contributions to the problem which interests us, let us try to see clearly, in historical perspective, how northern Europe appeared both before and after being touched by the searching light of Pliny's writings. Thus, we will be able to estimate the significance of his work at its true value from the Baltic point of view.

The modern reader will be amused and even shocked by his assiduity, sceptical at times, in noting down geographical legends, especially in regard to strange and fantastic monsters. I think that these notions appeared more credible to devotees of the early anthropomorphic religions than they do to us, especially if we take

into account the common belief of prehistoric humanity that every tribe had to have, so to say, an ancestral animal protector, a belief which may yet be traced in the ancient Greek mythology. For them, nature was filled with half-human, half-animal beings, and each of them had its origin in ancient or prehistoric times. For instance there were the centaurs—half-man, half-horse—who, as modern scientists believe, were the first creative imaginative reflexes of tribes confused by their first sight of a horse-riding tribe. The exploitation of horses for use in war came with the first attempt to harness them to war chariots (amply described in ancient texts by Homer, Julius Caesar, *etc.*, to mention only the most widely known). The figure of the Faun in human form was also one of the familiar notions of the worshipers of ancient deities, and it appears in some of Horace's loveliest poems. How lively and how effective must have been a similar, already poetic approach to these antropomorphic themes, judging from Ovid's long poem *Metamorphosis*, where already the poetic mood strongly prevails over the sacred one. Words of the poet Heine come to one's mind: *Die Welt, die glaubt nicht mehr an Flammen, und sie nimmt's für Poesie*; or Pausanias's scornful remark (*Arc. II 5*): "no longer do men turn into gods, except in the flattering words addressed to despots."

Now let us finish with a convincing vision of Pliny's geographical "flight" (*Teubner*, 4.94—97; *Bohn's Classical Library's translation*).

"We must now leave the Euxine and describe the outer portions of Europe. After passing the Rhipaeian mountains we have now to follow the shores of the Northern Ocean on the left, until we arrive at Gades. In this direction a great number of islands are said to exist that have no name; among which there is one which lies opposite to Scythia, mentioned under the name of Raunonia, and said to be at a distance of one day's sail from the mainland; and upon which, according to Timaeus, amber is thrown up by the waves in the spring season. As to the remaining parts of these shores, they are only known from reports of doubtful authority. With reference to the Septentrional or Northern Ocean; Hecataeus calls it, after we

have passed the mouth of the river Parapanisus, where it washes the Scythian shores, the Amalchian Sea, the word 'Amalchian' signifying in the language of these races, frozen. Philemon again says that it is called Morimarusa or the 'Dead Sea' by the Cimbri, as far as the Promontory of Rubeas, beyond which it has the name of the Cronian Sea. Xenophon of Lampsacus tells us that at a distance of three days' sail from the shores of Scythia, there is an island of immense size called Baltia, which by Pytheas is called Basilia. Some islands called Oonae are said to be here, the inhabitants of which live on the eggs of birds and oats; and others again upon which human beings are produced with the feet of horses, thence called *Hippopodes*. Some other islands are also mentioned as those of the Panotii, the people of which have ears of such extraordinary size as to cover the rest of the body, which is otherwise left naked.

"Leaving these however, we come to the nation of the Ingaevones, the first in Germany; at which we begin to have some information upon which more implicit reliance can be placed. In their country is an immense mountain called Sevo, not less than those of the Rhipaean range, and which forms an immense gulf along the shore as far as the Promontory of the Cimbri. This gulf, which has the name of the Codanian, is filled with islands; the most famous among which is Scandinavia, of a magnitude as yet unascertained: the only portion of it at all known is inhabited by the nation of the Hilleviones, who dwell in 500 villages, and call it a second world: it is generally supposed that the island of Eningia is of no less magnitude. Some writers state that these regions, as far as the River Vistula, are inhabited by the Sarmati, the Venedi, the Sciri, and the Hirri, and that there is a gulf there known by the name of Cylipenus, at the mouth of which is the island of Latris, after which comes another gulf, that of Lagnus, which borders on the Cimbri. The Cimbrian Promontory, running out into the sea for a great distance, forms a peninsula which bears the name of Cartris. Passing the coast, there are three and twenty islands which have been made known by the Roman arms: the most famous of which is Burcana, called by our people Fabaria, from the resemblance borne by a fruit which

grows there spontaneously. There are also those called Glaesaria by our soldiers, from their amber; but by the barbarians they are known as Austeravia and Actania.”

(In recent critical editions, some proper names must be corrected: Baunonia, Balcia, Scatinavia, *etc.*, instead of Raunonia, Baltia, Scandinavia, *etc.*)

What a wonderful vision of the dawn of geography! Everything is here: news which will be proved correct, as well as the legends and tales from no one knows what source. It is a difficult task to try to unravel it, but how interesting!

If we hope to get any true understanding from this vision we must first of all note that there are two distances which have been greatly foreshortened: the one from the shores of the Sea of Azov and the Black Sea to the shores of the Baltic Sea, the other, the distance from the shores of Scythia to Cadiz. If we are to follow Pliny in his geographical flight we must place the Sea of Azov in a perpendicular position and increase considerably the size of this sea-marsh (Palus Maeotis). Then we must surmount the non-existent Rhipaeen Mountains, and when we reach the shores of the Northern Ocean, we begin the moderately long journey (according to Pliny) to Cadiz. Let us not look too closely or we may find our way hindered by the Cimbrian Peninsula or wonder about the nameless islands sliding past on our right; however, the stages of our journey will be marked by noble and well-known estuaries (4.100). The fact that within the space of two sentences of average length we are able to travel from the Vistula estuary to the estuary of the Elbe, is in itself evidence of Pliny's conception of these distances, and let us not forget that we are dealing with an authority on Germany in the Roman world, which is proven, at least in theory, by his lost book on this country. Many interesting observations about this passage of Pliny are to be found in the monograph *Die Entdeckung des germanischen Nordens im Altertum* by D. Detlefsen (Berlin 1904), but there are not even the slightest hints on the Aestii and their relations with the amber trade.

Tacitus's short treatise *De Germania* has been interpreted and

VIII.
DESCRPTIO QUARTE TABVLE EVROPE



Ptolemy's map of Europe from the *Codex Harleianus Latinus*, British Museum, London.

translated without a great deal of exaggeration countless times. This study, written in 98 A.D. (Thomson, p. 242), has left a very definite mark on the history of Northern Europe. The name and fame of its author and the creativeness of his style are too well known to require further comment. This little book has to be approached with a great sense of responsibility if one does not want simply to repeat what has been said before. Tacitus's few lines about the Aestii have been quoted so many times, that it would be lost work to try to give some figures, and unfortunately we often see these lines out of their context and isolated in such a way that we lose a lot of the author's comprehensive vision. In my translation I have offered to the reader the text which directly interests us in its immediate literary environment, so that even if he is not deeply interested in ancient texts, he may get a clear idea of what the Roman historian had observed and understood of the regions which were beginning to open up to contact with the Mediterranean civilization at the beginning of our era.

Whatever fresh element Tacitus may have contributed to a new appreciation of Central and Northern Europe (especially in his descriptions of Germany and her near neighbours, his description of Britain being much poorer), we must pay him one tribute; the separate units of people, tribes and nations are no longer merely a string of proper names, but to him they have already become individual ethnical and cultural entities. Even concerning such regions as the ones situated east of the Aestii, necessarily very little known to him, we can feel his wish to give us characterizations of a cultural type, and whenever his sources dry up completely, he quite honestly admits it. Obviously, the elements of such characterizations cannot have been entirely imaginative: to risk undertaking such a task, there must have been an ever increasing influx of information into Rome from Northern Europe. Such is, in my appreciation, the development from Pliny to Tacitus. This period of transition was chronologically brief—about a quarter of a century, not more.

If we consider Tacitus's news from a Baltic angle (and this we must do ourselves since no one else has any interest in doing it), then

unfortunately we must admit that part of what he says about the Aestii is nonsense. This refers especially to his information, if we can call it so, about the amber trade. As the known saying went: *amicus Plato, sed magis amica veritas*. It is a pity that the Aestii should gather and give away amber without realising its value (just as the German Livonian humanists used to write about the native "Livonians", for instance, Bas. Plinius, in his *Encomium Rigae*, 1595, who threw away wax). True, there have been found many deposits of rough amber, and as we have seen some are quite large, but it would be a very strange tribe (the only one, according to Tacitus) who would toil to accumulate a treasure of amber, being entirely ignorant of its value. Furthermore, in giving away the amber (in following Tacitus's idea one cannot use the term selling) that Aestii should have received payment for it with amazement. The archaeological data speaks quite a different language. Quite clearly we are dealing here with some shrewd mediator who had an interest in vilifying the "amber producers" in order to promote himself. How and why this is so, we can no longer tell. It seems to me—and I shall be willingly responsible for this hypothesis—that here we have come across one of the "approaches" so common in Baltic history which extend through the unhappy history of these people like a crimson thread: namely, a tendency to accept the foreign point of view and to attribute to the Balts all the derogatory reports made by their enemies, strangers who have endeavoured to oppress and exploit them, and whom they have so fiercely resisted. These things are so well known that it is tedious to repeat them.

Nor am I entirely alone in expressing a similar opinion. For instance, J. F. John,⁸ the author of an old book, is dissatisfied with the lack of coincidence between Tacitus's text and the archaeological data, which begin to speak quite a different language, more characteristic of the local inhabitants as far back as the Stone Age. To R. Hennig the whole thing appears in a singular light although he is

⁸ I. F. John, *Naturgeschichte des Succins, oder des sogenannten Bernsteins; nebst Theorie der Bildung aller Fossile, bituminösen Inflammabilien des organischen Reichs und den Analysen derselben*. 1816, p. 36.

still prejudiced.⁹ He writes: "There is much, from the *eques* journey, that remains hidden to us. Important, however, is the news that he has found store-houses in Samland. It would be most interesting to know which people owned these store-houses. Unfortunately this fact is not revealed to us . . ." Really? Which then was "the only tribe to gather amber"? To a contemporary Englishman these things are quite simple (Thomson, 244): "Beyond these Goths are Aestii, who sell amber, a fossil tree resin dug up on their coast or washed up by the sea, and have sold it 'since Roman luxury gave it repute' (the famous words of Tacitus. A. Sp.). They were not really Germans at all, but Balts, and their name was to pass to the Finnish Estonians."

The same English geographer (p. 147) mentions also the passage in Pliny (37.36) where the latter quotes the translated story of Pytheas, about how the Goths living on the estuary of the River Metonomon, opposite the island of Abalum, sell the amber which is washed up by waves to their Teutonic neighbours (*proximisque Teutonis vendere*). As far as I know, none of the modern students now believe that Pytheas could have reached the shores of Eastern Prussia, and that such talk could only refer to the shores of the North Sea. Nevertheless, Pliny's notice is important as proof of the development of the amber trade of those days. However, profitable trade, as we know for certain from the fur trade of those ancient times, necessarily creates competition, and competition in its turn gives rise to various tradesmen's tricks for the purpose of eliminating their rivals.

I will not mention further observations of Tacitus concerning the Aestii, which have been discussed repeatedly, except in connection with his remark about the similarity of the Aestii and Celtic languages—a matter concerning which some students of Celtic antiquities differ from those whose opinions are currently accepted in our countries.

It would be wrong to pass unnoticed a factor of general coin-

⁹ *op. cit.*, I, p. 299.

vidence before taking leave of Tacitus's text. There is no doubt that the Roman campaigns in central and north-west Europe, in the century before and in the one after Christ, provided a large amount of fresh geographical information about Germany and also Britain, news which is linked with the name of Tacitus's father-in-law, Agricola. However, it must be said that the result of this great military effort was a general Roman retreat; that is to say, a withdrawal of their lines of defence from the banks of the River Elbe (this fateful river from the times of Augustus and Charlemagne to our days), where the line had been fixed by the Emperor Augustus, to the line which the Emperors Vespasian and Domitian (9—79, 51—96) had tried to fix along the banks of the middle Rhine and the upper Danube. Similar occurrences also took place in Scotland-Britain with the withdrawal of the Roman lines. These are described, with their relevant schematic maps, in M. Cary's well-known book.¹⁰ Tacitus is, so to speak, a man of the "second line of defence period" and therefore his proud Roman irony about the river Elbe is a very understandable complex (Cap. 41): "The Elbe, once a celebrated and famous river, is now barely mentioned (*nunc tantum auditum*).” This second defence line psychology may explain quite a few things, but I do not venture to draw any conclusions.

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The name of Ptolemy is one of the greatest of the world's age-old civilization, one of the milestones and signposts that mark new directions and discoveries in the history of humanity. And within the limited compass of our interests, Ptolemy's name stands for the highest achievements in the field of ancient geography, which are followed by a relapse or mental atrophy of long duration. If we could become acquainted with the tradition in which he grew up and the intellectual environment which formed his approach to geographical problems, some light would be thrown also upon his precursors and contemporaries, as for instance, Marinus of Tyre. But our knowledge of facts being meagre, all our attention must be

¹⁰ *op. cit.*, p. 274 sq.



Map 3. Part of map of the world according to Ptolemy. From E. H. Bunbury, *A History of Ancient Geography*...

focused upon the person of the famous Alexandrian astronomer, for that is what he was above all else. For the reader who has not looked through Ptolemy's book on geography, I will give here a few excerpts from the passages which mention the regions with which we are concerned.¹¹

"The GREATER VENEDAE races inhabit Sarmatia along the entire Venedicus bay; and above Dacia are the PEUCINI and the BASTERNAE; and along the entire coast of MAEOTIS are the IAZYGES and the ROXOLANI; more towards the interior from these are the AMAXOBI and the SCYTHIAN ALANI.

"Lesser races inhabit Sarmatia near the Vistula river.

"Below the VENEDAE are the GYTHONES, then the FINNI, then the SULONES;¹² below whom are the PHRUNGUNDIONES; then the AVARINI near the source of the Vistula river . . . (and so on to the Carpathian mountains. A. Sp.).

"Among those we have named to the east: below the VENEDAE are the GALINDAE, the SUDINI, and the STAVANI, extending as far as the ALAUNI; below these . . .

"Back from the Ocean, near the Venedicus bay, the VELTAE dwell, above whom are the OSSI; then more towards the north the CARBONES and towards the east are CAREOTAE and the SALI; below whom are the GELONES the HIPPOPODES and the MELANCHLANI; below these are the AGATHYRSI; then the AORSI and the PAGYRITAE; then the SAVARI and the BORUSCI to the Ripaeos mountains; then . . ."

To make the picture more complete, I will quote also Ptolemy's passage about the four rivers of the East-Baltic (Chap. V): "Sarmatian Europe is limited to the north by the Sarmatian Ocean near the Venedi gulf, and partly by unknown lands. The geography of these parts appears as follows: after the Vistula estuary comes the estuary of the River Chronos (*Χρόνου ποταμὸν ἐκβολαί*. Figures of measurements follow. A. Sp.), the estuary of the River Rudo . . .,

¹¹ Quoted from *Geography of Claudius Ptolemy*. Translated into English and edited by Edward Luther Stevenson . . . New York 1932. Cf. the original texts in *Claudii Ptolemæi Geographia* . . . Ed. Carolus Mullerus. Paris, Firmin Didot 1883.

¹² Also this denomination is not clear (cf. above).

the estuary of the River Turuntus, the estuary of the River Chesinus.”

Brief and “clear”. But if we should follow the course of the various explanations of these four proper names, we should be reminded of Dante’s words: *lasciate ogni speranza*. No matter how many researches have been made, each student has reached his own separate conclusion. Various methods have been tried—remembrance of the four rivers of terrestrial paradise; a critical comparison with Ptolemy’s precise river names in Britain and Ireland; a comparison with the four rivers of Sauromatia¹³ quoted by Ammianus Marcellinus (XXV. 8,29 and 38), *etc.* But always there are the same confusing and contrasting results.¹⁴ Somewhere, sometime, the complex combinations of sound of those names must have meant something to the people of those days. A similar phonetic process can be sensed in the confusing variation of proper names referring to the Baltic Sea: Basilia, Balcia, Abalus, Baunonia, *etc.* But the connecting thread has been lost in the course of so many generations, and so it seems that the riddle of the four rivers will remain a riddle, unless it can be solved by some sensational new method measuring immense lapses of time such as the present day pollen and irradiation tests.

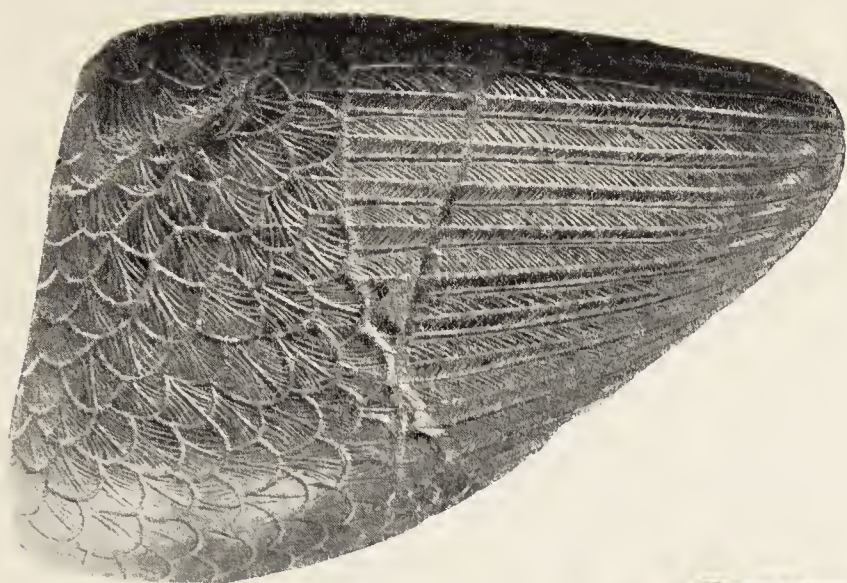
Ptolemy then, as I have said elsewhere, has disseminated a large number of proper names in the East European plain, north of the Sea of Azov and the Black Sea, which present the modern scholar with some very tough nuts to crack.¹⁵ In this connection I would like to mention Sir Ellis H. Minns,¹⁶ who with great care and a thorough study of varied sources has tried to throw some light on this assemblage of place names, which shows once more the great

¹³ F. A. Ukert, *Geographie der Griechen und Römer von den frühesten Zeiten bis auf Ptolemäus*, Weimar 1846, III. 2, p. 202—203.

¹⁴ A rather odd “solution” of the problem was given on the map of the 14th century Danish cartographer Claudius Clavus (Claudius Clausson Swart): he gives, evidently *faute de mieux*, to the “Ptolemy rivers”, instead of names, the numerals in Danish (*Förste, etc.*). Cf. the book of A. A. Björnbo and C. S. Petersen (German edition. Innsbruck, 1909).

¹⁵ The historical explanation of this fact is given by M. Rostovtzeff, *op. cit.*, p. 213.

¹⁶ Sir E. H. Minns, *Scythians and Greeks; a Survey of Ancient History and Archaeology on the North coast of the Euxine from the Danube to the Caucasus*, 1913.



Amber carvings from Aquileia: a bird's wing (above), a fish with some unidentified, probably sea-animal (below left), and a ram (below right). 1st-2nd century A. D. Approximately actual size. Photographs from the Archaeological Museum of Aquileia. Roman craftsmen carved in amber effigies of various animals, such as lions, panthers, dogs, goats, tortoises, dolphins, snails, and countless others.

interest displayed by people of Mediterranean culture in the remote northern and eastern parts of Europe. Sir Ellis H. Minns, a renowned English archaeologist, was the man who (if I may be permitted to mention the intricate progress of Latvian historiography) with exceptional kindness and sparing himself neither time nor trouble, helped by giving his advice the English edition of my *Latvian History* to see the light.

To conclude, let us put the following question: How could the progress of geographical knowledge in relation to northern Europe, and especially its Baltic sector, best be characterized, from Tacitus to Ptolemy, that is within the course of half a century? I would like to condense my deductions to three points:

(1) The number of proper names, mainly of tribes and nations, has increased considerably. Also the dwelling places of these tribes have begun to be consolidated: for instance the first data of geographical measurements appeared, and the general impression is that the endless guesswork drew to an end, to be replaced by more systematic tendencies.

(2) Many proper names (as we saw, Ptolemy was not interested in characterizations of a cultural nature) have been added in relation to the ancient Balts (tribes, rivers). This fact refers only to the Old Prussian tribes (of all the Baltic tribes), and it is a direct proof of the connection of this tribe with the amber trade, which remains in our case the mother and fountainhead of geographical information. Professor Šturms's latest study also throws some new light on this old problem.

(3) The geographic legends have almost vanished from Ptolemy's tale, with the exception of a few trivial examples and the Rhipaeon Mountains, which still remain, geographical measurements and all. They will continue to survive for a long time to come.

After Ptolemy, the spirit of scientific inquiry collapses rather suddenly. As an English geographer has put it "it goes into hibernation". We look in vain in the few remaining texts for some intellectual curiosity, some spirit of initiative not content to rest within the limits set by predecessors.

The third century A.D. approaches with the wars of the Goths and all the disasters which led the mighty Roman Empire to the brink of a precipice, although it is to retain its power for some time in spite of lost prestige and ever new humiliations, only to collapse finally in the next century. The inner social breakdown and ethnic fluctuations during the reign of the Severi are so violent and so sudden, that (to give one example out of many) it is precisely in this century that many new forms appear in the Latin language—the so-called Vulgarisms, which clearly indicate the direction taken by the coming Romanic languages. Under the conditions described in the chronicles of that time, it would appear hopeless to expect any flowering of culture. But to our joy and moral consolation we suddenly detect the marvellous, radiant bloom of Neo-Platonism (Plotinus, 205—270 A.D., who was even a personal friend of one of the “shadow” Emperors). It will be one of the last blooms of the antique world’s ideological garden, to blossom in the rarefied atmosphere of mystical abstraction.

When we hold before us the last ancient text connected with the amber trade—the letter of Theodoricus (Cassiodorus) to the Aestii, dating from the beginning of the 6th century A.D.—we perceive beyond the raised curtain quite a new world. However poor the intellectual tradition may have become—Cassiodorus mentions only Tacitus—the practical stimulus is still strong enough. Perhaps it has even acquired new vigour, for the Aestii again find a way for their amber to reach the Italian towns—this time to the Gothic capital Ravenna. They have worked out the way with difficulty, as can be sensed from Cassidorus’s letter for “it is not an easy task to undertake the long journey through countries inhabited by so many different tribes”. The great King of the Goths was much pleased by the establishment of relations with the Aestii and he encourages the continuance of these relations in the future.

There is no need to continue this tale, since I wrote years ago a special article on the subject: *The Aestii Embassy to the Court of Theodoricus in Ravenna*, the information for which was gathered



Amber objects from Aquileia workshop of the 1st-2nd century A. D. Actual size. Above: sculptured amber rings adorned (a) with an animal group, (b) with amoretto, and (c) with a woman's bust. Left: amber fruit—a fig, an almond and nuts. Right: a miniature Roman lamp and (below) an amber object of unknown use with a flower design carved in the centre. Photographs from the Archaeological Museum in Aquileia. Aquileia was the most important Roman centre of amber craftsmanship, noticeable for its varied amber carvings of high artistic value. The Museum of Aquileia possesses the richest collection of amber objects of that period. Among the numerous amber objects of this museum there are many carvings of different fruits.

with great difficulty.¹⁷ Reading it over again after many years, I see that there is nothing of importance to change, since no new texts have come to light since then. In this connection it would be useful to compare the two editions of the well known book by Schmidt.¹⁸ In time, no doubt, in this field as well, archaeology will have its say; as we can gather from some of Sir Mortimer Wheeler's trends of thought, for instance regarding the partial flow of Roman gold in a northerly direction in connection with the invasions of the Huns.¹⁹

Nevertheless there are some new and rather interesting outlooks. Shortly before the publication of my booklet, I was fortunate enough to become acquainted with the most recent study of the legends of the famous Gothic King Ermanaric (4th century A.D.), the founder of the first historically known Empire in the boundless plains of southern Russia. (*The legends of Ermanaric*, by Caroline Brady, University of California Press, 1943.)

In this study are to be found several interesting attempts by the learned author to connect the flow of these legends in the direction of the ancient homeland of the wandering Goths, (*i.e.*, in a northwesterly direction) with the ancient trade routes, as these trade routes were the link between peoples and traditions in those times. Recent archaeological discoveries have yielded much convincing data about the wanderings of the legends mentioned above.

Mrs. Brady writes: "It was not necessary for these legends to reach Scandinavia only by way of Germany . . . for there are other routes the legends could have taken." And again: "It could have been transmitted . . . directly from the Goths to North Germany and Scandinavia by way of the so-called 'culture stream' from the Black Sea to the Baltic, that is, the old trade route up the Dnieper and the Vistula. This stream, by which all manner of cultural influences and cultural objects were sent by the Goths back to the old homeland, was presumably broken off in the last quarter of the 4th century when the Huns, coming from the east, invaded the lands

¹⁷ *Latviešu vēsturnieku veltījums prof. R. Viperam*. Riga 1939.

¹⁸ *Geschichte der deutschen Stämme*. I ed. 1925; 2. ed. 1941.

¹⁹ *op. cit.*, p. 93—94.

west of the route. But with the death of Attila and the end of the Hunnish domination it was reopened. Arne points out that after the death of Attila all the Goths did not settle down in Pannonia and later follow Theodoric into Italy, but a number of them settled around Kiev, where we find manifold traces of them. He speaks of especially rich archaeological traces of the Goths around the Galuschinoborg from about the period 450—550, and these Goths were maintaining contacts between the Kiev district and East Prussia, and trading north along the Dnieper and the Niemen, between 450 and 550: fibula types found around Galuschinoborg and elsewhere in the Kiev district appear also in Mazuria in East Prussia. It is even possible that their trade was followed by actual northward movements of the Goths about the middle of the 6th century. Further, during this period from 450 to 550 there was open a route between the Goths of the Danube lands and Scandinavia which went from Carnuntum, between Pressburg and Vienna, up the March, down the Vistula to the Baltic, and thence along the coasts of East Prussia and Courland . . . after the Hunnish advance, plunder and imperial subsidies created a golden age for the northern peoples from about the middle of the fifth to the middle of the sixth centuries (there follow quotations of archaeological evidence). In short, this archaeological evidence definitely establishes the existence of relations between the Ostrogoths and East Prussia and Scandinavia a century after the death of Ermanaric.” (p. 283—285. See bibliography on pp. 298, 299, 319 and 322).²⁰

²⁰ The analysis of the results of the invasion and the rôle of the Huns in Eastern Europe, especially in regard to the beginning of the massive expansion of the Slavs, and in this connection in regard to the fate and the probable movements of the Baltic tribes, still awaits its master. The historical documentation being extremely poor, this historian of to-morrow will have to look intensively for archaeological and linguistic researches, if such should already be sufficiently developed, to be used as some kind of substitutes for the historical texts. The former professor of the University of Riga, now professor at Melbourne, Australia, E. Dunsdorfs, has recently formulated some kind of working hypothesis concerning the probable expansion of the Huns' empire in North-eastern Europe: it means covering also the habitat of the Ancient Balts. Cf. his *Senie stāsti*, Melbourne, 1955; p. 23. A critical evaluation of the actual historical documentation is to be found in

Looking at the development of the Ermanaric legends as far as they touch on the early history of the Baltic peoples, especially the old Prussians, more or less precisely called Aestii in those days (see pages 163, 164, of Mrs. Brady's book), we have to point out the fact that some important conclusions, or at least suggestions, may be gathered from the Gothic matters mentioned above. For the moment, I venture to underline three points for some kind of working method for the investigations of to-morrow:

(1) The relations of some of the Old Prussian tribes, particularly of the Galindians, already mentioned by Ptolémý, as we have seen, could have been far closer to the Goths of Southern Russia than has been supposed up to now.

(2) Always more clearly delineated is the background of the trade and cultural relations between the Goths of Italy and the Old Prussians, as we dimly perceive from the well known letter of Cassiodorus to the Hesti, as he calls them.

(3) The flow of gold towards the North, in connection with the invasions of the Huns, may explain to some extent the high level of the Old Prussian civilization, as has been repeatedly pointed out by various German archaeologists, for instance by C. Engel.

To close this chapter we will give some elementary information about the antique maps of the world.

From the early Middle Ages to the Renaissance, actually to the second half of the 16th century, the cartographic profile of the Eastern Baltic was perhaps the most singular of all the seas and coastlines on the geographic maps of those times, when compared with the actual shape of its coast. A reputed English cartographer points out two principal errors on Ptolemy's maps,²¹ *i.e.*, the mistaken cartographic projections of Scotland and of the Indian Ocean, but he

E. A. Thompson's *A History of Attila and the Huns*, 1948. His statements, like, for instance: "Attila's empire stretched from the Caucasus to the confines of France and Denmark" (p. 177) would necessarily create the problem of the Hunnic expansion towards the South-eastern shores of the Baltic Sea and the peoples living there in those centuries (*Cf.* pp. 22, 75, 95, 135—136, 153, 159).

²¹ G. R. Crone, *Maps and Their Makers*. An Introduction to the History of Cartography. 1953; p. 22.

says nothing of the "conspicuous errors" in the figuration of the Eastern Baltic coast.

Our coast, having been fixed in Ptolemy's "standard-conception", remains unchanged for reasons which I have enumerated elsewhere. It remains unchanged and unreal on the sea maps and on the map drawings of the centuries to come, until the scholars of the Renaissance reinstated it in the world of reality, removing the legendary Rhipaeon Mountains, giving rivers their real names, *etc.* These are questions of another order—here we want to talk about maps of the classical period, or rather of the very fragmentary information we have on them.

The maps which illustrate this little study are of course, theoretical reconstructions based on the ancient texts and on the ancient world measurements, which have by now been checked and corrected. Under the circumstances a certain lack of precision is unavoidable, and we can clearly see the result of such miscalculations of measurement and projection in the two versions of Eratosthenes's map—one Bunbury's, the other Kiepert's—superimposed on each other in different colours. (See Thomson, p. 142.)

For a long time the so-called Ptolemy's maps were believed to be authentic—the work either of the author himself or of one of his contemporaries. This opinion is also held by J. Fisher, S. J., who published the large folio edition in 1932 from the beautiful 12th and 15th centuries manuscript now in the Vatican Library. But the argument did not end here. Other voices were raised, for instance that of L. Bagrow, editor and publisher of *Imago Mundi*, who tried to prove by witty and ingenious argumentation that the so-called Ptolemy's maps are several centuries more recent.²² The often quoted Thomson, evidently unwilling to enter into the details of these disputes, confined himself to the following statement:²³ "His (Ptolemy's) book is almost wholly unreadable and hardly meant to be read; it consists mainly of long lists of places, each with its figures of latitude and longitude, from which anyone with enough patience can construct the maps for himself. Unfortunately such material

²² Crone, *op. cit.*, p. 20—21. ²³ *op. cit.*, p. 229—230.



Amber objects from Aquileia. Left: a pendant (above), an acorn (below); centre: acanthus-leaf-shaped phial (above), a pendant (below); right: a small wand consisting of an iron bar encircled by cylindrical amber discs. Similar wands have been found in the ancient tombs of Aquileia and Cologne. Their use is unknown. 1st-2nd century A. D. Actual size. Photographs from the Archaeological Museum of Aquileia. The Aquileia centre of amber crafts strove to satisfy the refined tastes of the Roman ladies and their demands for amber jewelry and toilet articles. There was therefore a large production of ornamented jars, scent phials, ear-spoons, knives, spoonhandles, and various ornaments: rings, necklaces and pendants which often had the character of amulets.

was peculiarly liable to corruption, and a painful labour of editing is still needed before we can be sure of having the best possible text and maps closely akin to his—for he certainly drew maps for his own use, and it was from these that he transcribed his figures. Whether he published maps is disputed.” The earlier quoted Crone, inclined to agree with Thomson’s judgements, further detailed the fact that “of the world map it is definitely stated that this was drawn by one Agathodaimon of Alexandria, who may have been contemporary with Ptolemy”.²⁴

I have used these quotations in order to avoid explaining exactly what our interest in the theoretical, *i.e.*, reconstructed maps should be, and what degree of exactitude can be attributed to the so-called “deadline” of our coast. Actually, the truth about it belongs to classical times, as we have already said. There is no need to mention here the so-called Peutinger map—a road map of Imperial Rome—since it does not reach as far as the object of our interest.

There is also the map known as “Agrippa’s World Map”, *Orbis Terrarum*, which was commissioned to be drawn and engraved on stone by the famous M. V. Agrippa, son-in-law and collaborator of the Emperor Augustus (63—12 B.C.). It was placed—an object of general admiration—in the Portico Vipsanius in Rome. Pliny the Elder tells us that Agrippa took great care over and interest in the shaping of this *map̄pa mundi*, as it is called in ordinary terminology (3.17: *tanta diligentia* and *cura*. See also Crone, p. 24). Much has been written and surmised about this noteworthy *map̄pa mundi*. Whether it was round or square; whether it was illustrated with schematic drawing of towns, people, animals, *etc.*, like the famous Hereford and Epstorf maps which are supposed to be rather akin to the Roman prototype,²⁵ who can now say? One thing only seems

²⁴ *op. cit.*, p. 20—21.

²⁵ Konrad Miller, *Die Ältesten Weltkarten, Herausgegeben und Erläutert*. IV, 147: *Die römische Weltkarte war mit Bildern geschmückt, wie es die grösseren mittelalterlichen Karten noch zeigen. Die Bilder bestanden in Zeichen für Städte, Seehäfen, Leuchttürme, Altäre, Gebirgsthore, Labyrinth u.a.; die Wüste war durch wilde Tiere dargestellt. Der äussere Umkreis (Skythien, Indien, Aethiopien) aber enthielt nach allen Anzeichen schon auf der Agrippakarte alle jene Fabel-*

to be clear; this Roman *mappa mundi* had a great, even tyrannical influence on the round world maps of the following centuries, which were in fashion as late as the middle of the 16th century.

To conclude, Ptolemy's maps, or at least the maps attributed to him, remained practically unknown to the peoples of the Middle Ages with the exception of the Arabs, who were already acquainted with them in the 10th century. In the case of the famous Idrisi (12th century) there are vestiges of some contact between the Latin and Arab geographers of the Middle Ages. Ptolemy's astronomical work *Almagest* was already widely applied in the 13th century (and translated earlier), whereas his *Geography* had to wait "until the century of Columbus and Da Gama".²⁶

The direct and despotic influence of Ptolemy's maps on cartography, for instance on the drawings of our Livonian coast, begins only in the 15th century and persists for at least a whole century.

wesen, welche Mela, Plinius, Martianus Capella, Solinus, Isidor, Augustinus, Imago Mundi u.a. schildern, und welche wir aus den grösseren Karten des Mittelalters (Ebtorf, Hereford, Beatus, Ranulf) kennen.

²⁶ *Travel and Discovery in the Renaissance, 1420—1620.* By Boies Penrose, 1952; p. 8.



Amber carvings from Aquileia, 1st-2nd century A. D. Approximately actual size. Above left: amber cosmetics jar with a figurative ornamentation of vintaging Erotes, a so-called pyxis. Photograph from the collection of the British Museum, London (Cf. O. Brogan, *Trade between the Roman Empire and the Free Germans*). Above right: amber cosmetics jar with the bust of a bacchante. Below: amber carving of Eros fighting Anteros. Photographs from the Archaeological Museum of Aquileia. In the Roman Empire amber was a highly esteemed raw material for small plastic carvings like the one shown here. In the amber collection of Aquileia there are many carvings of Eros in various attitudes and actions: riding horses or dolphins, playing with different animals, etc. There are also figurines of Venus, Minerva, Nereid on sea-horses, as well as various human figurines, busts and masks.

CHAPTER V

Geographical legends

This last chapter will deal not so much with amber and its trade routes as with the geographical discovery of the Eastern Baltic during the Roman Empire. This can be termed its first geographical discovery, since the second, the real and complete one, was to come only in the 16th century. It was only then that our shores, released from the stilted theoretical line—or dead-line, as I once called it—of Ptolemy's maps, and of some of the medieval *mappae mundi*, and from the "sickle" line of the sea maps of the Middle Age or so-called portolans, acquire the natural shape of their coast lines, with the characteristic and to us familiar outline of the Kurzeme (Courland) peninsula, and the clustered contours of the Estonian islands. In an earlier chapter (IV) I have already mentioned some of the cartographic peculiarities of our antiquity: they are probably the most individual ones in the whole of ancient and mediaeval cartographic history, and their being so implies and presages equally individual historic destinies for the countries which these maps try to cover up in such a fanciful way.

In this chapter mention should be made of a certain cycle of geographic legends directly connected with the Baltic coast. We should really confine ourselves to the classical period, as was foreseen in the chronological framework of this little book; however all the relevant facts are so little known or passed by unnoticed, especially from our Baltic point of view, that it would be unwise not to transgress briefly this chronological setting and show, even in a few words, the exotic aspects of this problem. So far, to my knowledge, it has been done only once in Latvian historiography, *i.e.*, in the article about the Rhipaeian mountains (*Latvian Encyclopaedia*, p. 2099—2100).

The legends we want to examine appear already in the very first texts of antiquity, Homer, Hesiod, Herodotus, Pindar and others. Naturally, these very early conceptions, bound to certain titles and subjects, will have a different meaning later on, in a different

geographical location. But the main thing indicated by this observation is the fact that these legends have very archaic and deep roots in ancient Greek beliefs, and mystical-sacred doctrines. We have little space here to go into details, nor is our wish to impose upon the reader, perhaps an uninterested one, the ancient Greek geographical problems with their deductions and analyses: we will therefore touch upon the subject only within the limits of general relationships, referring the interested reader to specialized studies.

The groups or cycles of legends to be discussed are the following:

The Rhipaeae mountains,

The Hyperboreans (usually a people, sometimes mountains),

The Amazons,

Various weird monsters, half-human, half-animal,

Alexander the Great's altars, and boundaries fixed by him,

The myth of Phaethon (Heliades' tears—amber).

Beginning with the last, let us say a few words about the myth of the Heliades, so beautifully and vividly related by Ovid for his "drawing-room" listeners (*Met.* Lib. II), endeavouring to cover up nature's old mysteries with the bright cloak of modern aestheticism. This dramatically sentimental text has remained in our memories from school days: there is therefore no need to repeat it, especially as we read in an earlier chapter Diodorus's and Pliny's references to the Phaethon myth, and reports of its popularity. It shows once more the considerable demand for amber in the ancient world. After what we have been reading in the preceding chapters, we can no longer have any doubt about it. We can imagine, for instance, how in the same old Roman society the already highly esteemed amber may have become still more appealing, desirable (Pliny had said: "in amber we love the very notion of gentleness"), when linked with such romantically sensitive and aesthetic images as are conjured up by Ovid, in the conclusion of his poetic legend (II 364—366):

*Inde fluunt lachrymae, stillataque sole rigescunt
De ramis electra novis, quae lucidus amnis
Excipit et nuribus mittit gestanda Latinis.*

(And so flow the tears of the Heliades, like drops from young branches [*i.e.*, just converted] dripping in the sun, they harden into amber. The gleaming river receives them and carries them to the young Latin women, to be worn [as necklaces]).

We will note also that the passage quoted was written at a time (Ovid lived from 43 B.C. to 17? A.D.) when the amber trade with Rome had not yet entered its rapid, large scale, or so-called commercial phase, and when notions on amber were still wrapped in the earlier, less tangible, mythical atmosphere.

Several studies have been written about Phaethon, *i.e.*, the myth of the Heliades' tears. The apparently most interesting one, the booklet written by R. Hennig,¹ I have not been able to obtain. But however interesting these subtle analyses may be in themselves, to us, in my opinion, they are not indispensable, as they do not touch upon our shores. In other words, we do not perceive those aerial arches that connect our pristine regions created of presentiments and possibilities, with the ideological gardens and aesthetic concepts of Mediterranean culture.

Little is to be said here also about the altars and boundaries "fixed" by Alexander the Great, which can be seen *ad oculos* in many a so-called Ptolemy's map of the 15th and 16th centuries. The same can be said of the tribes of monsters which the great conqueror imprisoned behind thick walls, to save the world from their infamous deeds. These groups of legends blossom forth especially in the Middle Ages, when Western Europe had already experienced many invasions from the east. Among the invaders, there were some—as Leonardo da Vinci puts it—from whom Mars, the god of war, hid himself in terror.

If the King of Macedonia could attain such omnipotence in the minds of people (see Polibius's words on him, quoted earlier), then the blossoming of legends around his name, even during his lifetime, is quite understandable. The writer-flatterers, laying on the colours for the sake of flattery, have contributed to the creation of a

¹ To the evaluation of the works of this interesting scholar a special article is dedicated by J. H. Schultze in the *Petermanns Geogr. Mitteilungen*, 96 (1952).

wondrous geographical confusion, says a student of the last century. For instance, the people of those days² “used to consider the River Tanaïs (Don) and the Caucasus the furthestmost points to the north and to the east, but as Alexander had neither conquered these mountains nor reached the river, their names were referred to other mountains and rivers, or they were given the most fantastic directions, only to make the writers say that the Macedonian, like other heroes and demi-gods, had crossed and appropriated for himself the remotest corners of the earth . . . There were even tales of a large city built by him near Tanaïs, and of the altars he had erected there . . . Some went so far as to affirm that he had crossed the Ursa Major constellation (*i.e.*, the furthest regions to the north, according to Aristotle’s definition in his *Meteorology*. A. Sp.), and walked across the whole earth . . . (another) says that he vanquished the whole of Europe and Asia.”

A detailed documentation of the above quotation is to be found in the text. The great Fr. Nansen, too, vividly describes Alexander’s fame in the centuries to come: “He grew and reached super-human proportions . . . He took over the whole earth, from the Pillars of Hercules at the westernmost end of the world to the sun and moon trees in the east . . . Lifted up by tame eagles, he is said to have attempted to reach the skies—more than that, Christian and Mohammedan legendary tradition has it that he even tried to climb over the ramparts of Paradise.”³

All this and much more is of course, characteristic of those times as well as those people, but it has no direct bearing on our main theme and analysis—that is, finding out exactly how and where our shores are to be linked with the geographically vast and exotic cycle of ancient beliefs. Instead let us pause for a while at that part of the legend complex which to a certain extent concerns us, although ordinarily it is difficult to fit a geographical legend into very precise boundaries.

Let us now examine the fantastic supernatural creatures which we have sometimes “encountered” also on our shores. Usually they

² Ukert, *op. cit.*, III. 2, p. 39—40. ³ *Nebelheim*, II, p. 344.

appear in the form of inscriptions or pictures on medieval *mappae mundi*, in places where, at least theoretically, the localities inhabited by the Baltic peoples should be. This can be seen more or less clearly on the Hereford *mappa mundi*.⁴ This *mappa mundi* is full of drawings of fantastic and monstrous creatures, also in "localities", near to our regions. But these are really matters belonging to a later period, mentioned here for the sake of colour. In classical texts we find these archaically abnormal or mentally fantastic creatures in the direction of our regions not only in the eclectic Pliny (for instance, VII, 11 and 23) but to a lesser degree also in the critical Tacitus, not to mention the Greeks; in the reasonable Herodotus or even the stern Strabo, for instance, to cite only the most important.

How far would our curiosity lead us if we should ask where and when and how these various dog-headed, single-footed creatures and their close or distant relations originated and grew, in what eastern folklore their roots were set?⁵ Let us content ourselves with mentioning those renowned authors who have marked the stages of such a study. The first one is Ctesias, court physician of the Persian King of Kings, who held this post for 17 years, returning to his native Knidos in 398 B.C. He had thoroughly absorbed the tradition of these exotic concepts and later passed them on, for further "exploitation", to the westerners, whose minds had been stirred up by Alexander the Great (356—323). Ctesias (especially in his *Indika*) was the originator of the concept "India—the land of wonders".

The second to be mentioned is the so-called Pseudo-Callisthenes,⁶ who—chronologically—finding himself on the threshold between ancient times and the early Middle Ages, set up the sign-posts to later developments.⁷ The editor of the text writes: "This popular romance about Alexander, blossoming and branching out ever more

⁴ On this map exist many studies, especially by English geographers, cf. the Bibliography in Crone's book.

⁵ Different dictionaries of ancient mythology deal with these subjects. Cf. the recent study of J. Baltrušaitis, *Le Moyen Age Fantastique*, 1955.

⁶ Firmin Didot edition.

⁷ *op. cit.*, p. 363.

abundantly, was the favourite reading matter of the Middle Ages, with all its muddled and fantastic geography, its hordes of monsters and other wonders in the world's remotest corners."

To quote Ctesias's own text should not be necessary, its fragmentary nature being of little attraction. However, I should like to refer the reader to the paraphrase of E. H. Bunbury,⁸ in which the reader himself will come across a whole row of chimerical animals (to the Greeks even elephants, crocodiles, *etc.*, were such) and nature's phenomena (deformities).

The gold-digging ants deserve special mention, as do the gold-watching griffons, usually inhabiting the furthest regions of the North (according to ancient geographical notions) which can be seen depicted in many a *mappa mundi*.

If ever there was a legendary theme truly faithful to the Baltic coast, it was the legend of the women-warriors, the Amazons. Even Adam of Bremen (11th cent. A.D.), who sheds the first rays of light on modern geography, mentions them in all earnestness (IV, 19): "In this sea there are also other islands, populated by barbarians so wild that they run away from seafarers. It is also said that these Baltic coasts may be inhabited by Amazons, and that this locality is called the land of women. There are those who can tell that they become pregnant by drinking water. But others relate that they may become pregnant from passing merchants or from those (prisoners) living among them, or from the monsters which abound in those parts. We think the latter to be the most likely hypothesis. When they give birth, children of the male sex are dog-headed, but the females are the most beautiful women. They spurn cohabitation with men, and if the latter try to approach their domain, they are valiantly repelled. Dog-headed are those whose heads are upon their breasts, who can often be seen as prisoners in Russia (in Ruzzia), and who speak their words by barking."

Pliny (VI, 35, enumeration according to Teubner, translation

⁸ E. H. Bunbury, *A History of Ancient Geography among the Greeks and Romans from the earliest ages to the fall of the Roman Empire*, I—II, 1879.

Cf. I, p. 340—341.

from *Bohn's Library*) in his time puts the Amazons in another environment: "... where the chain of the Rhipaeon Mountains terminates, and with it the extreme rigour of the climate; here, too, we have heard of a certain people being situated, called the Arimphaei, a race not much unlike the Hyperborei. Their habitations are the groves, and the berries their diet; long hair is held to be disgraceful by the women as well as the men, and they are mild in their manners. Hence it is that they are reported to be a sacred race, and are never molested even by the savage tribes which border upon them, and not only they, but such other persons as well as may have fled to them for refuge. Beyond these we come straight to the Scythians, the Cimmerii, the Cisianthi, the Georgi, and a nation of Amazons. These last extend to the Caspian and Hyrcanian Sea." (Two different appellations for one and the same sea. A. Sp.)

In VI, 19 we are told of the tribes living in the neighbourhood of Maeotis; among them may be the Sauromats "Gynaecocratumeni (ruled over by women), the husbands to the Amazons (*Amazonum connubia*)."⁹ The Amazon myth of the antique world,⁹ which could have a background of some historical truth, tended since the beginning of the Homeric period to be located in a region of Asia Minor, where the realm of these warlike women may have been situated. This popular Greek myth is the most widespread both in the writings of various authors and in the figurative arts, found in several variants. Purely from the mythological-genetic point of view, it is apparently one of the most difficult myths to explain in the whole of ancient Greek mythology. It also tries to "seek refuge" on the shores of the remote Northern Ocean, which was the last haven of many another myth, as well as of the *Esbatoi andron* (the last of men).

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⁹ Pauly's *Encycl. Amazones*. An original and interesting hypothesis explaining the *raison d'être* of the Amazon empire on the shores of the Azov Sea is given in connection with Herodotus IV, 116 by M. Rostovtzeff, *Iranians and Greeks in South Russia*, 1922; p. 33—34.

We are now left with the two most important groups of legends to talk about:

- (1) The happy Hyperboreans (dwelling beyond the North).
- (2) The Rhipaeian mountains.

The motive of the Hyperboreans repeats itself on the northern shores of the Ocean "encompassing the terrestrial discus", where—according to the formula so wonderfully expressed by Adam of Bremen—"the tired world ends itself", *i.e.*, partly also on the Baltic shores. This motive is most interesting and profound for various reasons.

First, for its archaic sacred aspect. A renowned historian formulates it thus:¹⁰ "The Hyperboreans is an appellation devised by Greek geographers in ancient times, to designate the unknown tribes living beyond the northern mountain chain of the Greek peninsula. This supposition has its roots in the cult of Apollo and the Delos myths; later the same concept had been transferred to the remotest parts where the world ends, beyond the massive chain of the Rhipaeian mountains, on the slopes of which gathered clouds and storms . . . creators of winter." To take another quotation:¹¹ "The legend of the Hyperboreans in Delphi is based upon the cult of souls and the belief that the spirits of the blessed have a communal life in paradise. On the isle of Delos, on the other hand, we find only a cult of agriculture. Both themes show traces of provenance from Thrace and the Balkan peninsula."

So much for the ancient, sacred roots of this myth in Greece. Let us now examine its connection with the moral-philosophical trends of ideas in Imperial Rome, at a time which interests us particularly because of its coincidence with the chronological climax of the amber trade.

A. Riese, author of a book which has received little attention, *L'idéal de justice et de bonheur et la vie primitive des peuples du nord dans la littérature grecque et latine* (translated from German:

¹⁰ H. Berger, *Geschichte der wissenschaftlichen Erdkunde der Griechen*. 1903, p. 125.

¹¹ Pauly's *Encycl.*, p. 279.



Amber pendants—miniature axes from Daugmale, Latvia. 11th century A. D. Actual size. Photograph from the State Historical Museum, Riga.



Amber necklace and beads from Aizkraukle, Latvia. 11th century A. D. Actual size. Photograph from the British Museum, London.

Die Idealisierung der Naturvölker des Nordens in der griechischen und römischen Literatur . . . Paris 1885), links with great subtlety, within the limits of the texts available, the ancient Greek and Roman longing for social well-being with their geographical dreams about the so-called "higher moral code" of the barbarians—their blissfully primitive, carefree state of mind, starting with Homer's "mare-milking" nomads, his impecunious (*abioi*) and therefore most righteous men,¹² and so on. This scholar has skilfully tried to penetrate the reflexes of the Pythagorean (Vegetarian), Platonist, Stoïc and other main philosophical trends of the world of antiquity, in relation to the above mentioned geographical longing, in all its diversity. His exhaustive study in this field, while dealing with such a particular subject as ours, is most unusual. Most other authors touch the subject only superficially, as, for instance, telling us about Tacitus's propensity to idealize the Old Germans, *i.e.*, their uncorrupt morals, akin to Virgil's ideal, as found in the Georgics (II, 458), *etc.* As we know, similar trends of thought had to be invested with the official Stoïcism, but at the same time showed a strong undercurrent of the secretly adored Epicureanism. We must also mention the admirably "modern" description of the life of primitive peoples in Lucretius's *De Rerum Natura* (Book V).

It has sometimes been noticed that P. Mela, in his already quoted short treatise, has devoted much attention to the motive of the Hyperboreans. I should like to underline the possibility that Mela's increasing interest, be it only in the legends, stands in direct relation to the first discovery of the Baltic Sea. Mela, as we saw, was the first to turn his attention to the geographical possibilities of our regions. The *lacunae* left by science were filled by legend, both stemming

¹² Homer. *Iliad* XIII, 3—6:

Then turn'd to Thracia from the field of fight
 Those eyes that shed insufferable light,
 To where the Mysians prove their martial force,
 And hardy Thracians tame the savage horse;
 And where the far-famed Hippomolgian strays,
 Renown'd for justice and for length of days;
 Thrice happy race! that, innocent of blood,
 From milk, innoxious, seek their simple food:

from the ever growing interest in the unknown sector of the "unknown ocean's" coast. The thread of continuity as regards the Hyperboreans is not lost by authors after Mela, but the progress of scientific reality is felt ever more sharply, as we can ascertain in the case of Pliny.

Many are the descriptions of these happy people. I shall not attempt to enumerate all of them here, but one should stir the reader's interest, namely a quotation from *Pythia*, coming from Pindar's eloquent pen (Pindar lived around 522?—443 B.C.):

The Odes of Pindar—Translated by Richmond Lattimore, Chicago 1947. *Pythia* 10

... Never on foot or ship could you find
the marvellous road to the feast of the Hyperboreans.
Perseus came to them once, a leader of men,
entered their houses,
found them making hecatombs of asses
to Apollo, who in their joyance and favourable
speech rejoices, and smiles to see
the rampant lust of the lewd beasts.

Never the Muse is absent
from their ways: lyres clash, and flutes cry,
and everywhere maiden choruses whirling.
They bind their hair in golden laurel and take their holiday.
Neither disease nor bitter old age is mixed
in their sacred blood; far from labour and battle

they live; they escape Nemesis
the overjust. Danaë's son came that day,
breathing strength in his heart, and Athene led him
to mix with those blessed men.

Let us add from another, later text the swan's motive to the cult of Apollo (*Fragmenta Historicum Graecorum*, Firmin-Didot, II

387): "When the Hyberboreans sacrifice to the god at the appointed time, countless flocks of swans fly from the Rhipaeen mountains, as they call them. After having circled the temple, as if observing, they descend and poise themselves on the wide and beautiful palisade," and when the singers begin to praise the god with their songs, the swans join in the sacred hymns.

In Mela's description of the Hyperborean land (3.36) are sounded a few more realistic, really geographical notes, like the six months long day and the six months long night, or the repetition of Herodotus's information about Hyperborean maidens carrying gifts to Delphi. According to some scholars, this may already have been an indication of the amber trade. Mela is followed by Pliny in his description of the Hyperboreans (IV, 88—89), stressing even more the realistic geographical elements which have become more numerous with the influx of news from the north, but he attaches a sceptical comment to the legendary part: "if we can believe this (*si credimus*)". Here, too, we sense the strong influence of Herodotus's themes.

We Balts can see a certain link joining our ancient existence to the vision of these remote golden horizons. It is the tale about the wise Vidvud, King of the Aestii and a lawmaker such as Moses was to the Hebrews, or Solon to the Greeks, and about his "Hyperborean" death. The chronology of this legend, as deduced from various chronicles of the 15th and 16th centuries,¹³ seems to be rather hopeless at the moment, however, some characteristic traits point to a kinship with a certain complex of the Hyberborean legends.

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¹³ I cannot possibly here quote from nor elaborate on those chronicles from the angle indicated: all I can do at the moment is to offer the famous passage from M. Strykowski's *Kronika Polska, Litewska, Zmodzka y Wszystkiew Rusi* (1st ed. 1582, 2nd ed. 1766, 3rd ed. 1844—46) in which Vidvuds appeals to the Old-Prussian people for some teachings on the ways of the working-bees, to be applied to their "reformed" social life.

And now, lastly, about the Rhipaean mountains.

The history of these mountains has yet to be written, and when it is, there will be some chapters in it also about our regions. Meanwhile we must be content with the Pauly-Wissowa's *Encyclopaedia* which provides many learned investigations into the subject. But it is almost completely devoid of facts about the Baltic, as often happens with the so-called big historiographies. Let us, therefore, sketch here a schematic outline of this legend.

The myth of the Rhipaean mountains is one of the western world's oldest and most enduring. Their first definition was given to them in the 7th century B.C. by the Greek poet Alkman. The aged Homer, too, has something to say about them. At the other end, chronologically, we still see in the 16th century the struggle for existence of this famous chain of mountains which goes on in old texts and on maps, directly or closely touching the Baltic shores also. It makes a curious page in the thick folio of the history of the human race!

The tale in a few words is as follows. The ancient Greeks fancied this tremendous mountain range (*rhipé* in Greek means stormy north wind) to be somewhere to the north, not too far from their peninsula and their blue sea—for instance, in Thrace. But the broader early man's horizons of experience and knowledge grew, the more this mountain range had to retreat to the "Unknown" Ocean, "beyond knowledge towards the north", as Sir Ellis H. Minns puts it (p. 113). Already in the time of classical Greece—after having travelled over the whole of the then unknown and wild Western Europe (Polybius), from "the Celtic shores and islands" in the west to the Caspian "bay" in the east—they had reached our vicinity, and the great Ptolemy imagined he could even measure the geographical distances which indicated their position. It is there that the Rhipaeans finally remain, because, as we see it, for several centuries after Ptolemy there was no intellectual initiative towards geographical research and discovery, and people lived by slogans. In the minds of these people, the Rhipaean mountains became ever more firmly established in our regions or in their neighbourhood,

whatever the map or text indicated; from the summit of these mountains usually springs the River Tanaïs (Don), which according to the resolute beliefs of those days represented the boundary between Europe and Asia. This river flows into the perpendicularly propped up and exaggeratedly enlarged Sea of Azov (Maeotis), which in turn joins up with the Black Sea. This, in brief, is the standard conception, descriptions of which can be found in countless texts of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, and which is represented in many a *mappa mundi*. There are, of course, a few variations, but the basic trend remains the same.

Both these (if I may so call them) slogans: the "dead" line of our coast, and the stereotyped sequence of the Rhipaeans-Tanaïs-Maeotis-Pontus, seem to belong to the intellectual "iron inventory" of many generations, with regard to our coasts and Eastern Europe in general. The Rhipaeans, in this respect, occupy such a "stable" place that some 16th century cartographers, perhaps, already under the influence of new information, draw in the locality which this mountain range should occupy, a dark line of forests, thus rendering homage to the Greek poet Alkman who was the first to describe it. Of all the mediaeval geographical authorities, only the French cartographer Cardinal Pierre d'Ailly (15th century) talks of the *Ripheis silvis*.¹⁴

Before taking leave of the testimonies of the ancient world let us mention once more Herodotus, albeit for the popularity of his descriptions of the north (see especially Sir Ellis H. Minns's analyses, chapters 3 and 5).¹⁵ Herodotus does not mention the Rhipaeian mountains by name, but his description of the northern winter, with details which sound strangely to the ears of a southerner, had left a considerable impression on later times, and his "Hyperboreans", the "metereological myth", as Humboldt calls it, have found their way into many texts—that of Pliny (IV, 88 *etc.*), to mention only one.

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¹⁴ *Imago Mundi de Pierre d'Ailly* (1350—1420) par Edmond Buron, I—III, Paris 1930.

¹⁵ *op. cit.*, Chapt. 3 and 5.

When the 16th, or geography's great century had pioneered new ways across the world's oceans, had broken the ice of hardened old beliefs and dispersed the mirages hovering above it, it provoked also the collapse of the tenacious anachronisms linked with our shores and regions. A sort of "discovery of America" took place here also, and it is no wonder—nor is it pure chance—that our Livonian humanists at the end of the 16th century sought some examples in the travel descriptions of Columbus, Vespucci and others; nor that the Jesuit Order, at the beginning of the 17th century, had at its school graduation ceremonies recitations in the language of ancient Livonia on the same level as, let us say, that of the old Incas.¹⁶ Even more characteristic is the fact that the renowned cartographer M. Waldseemüller, the same who in his first work (1507)¹⁷ had given the new-found continent of the antipodes the name it was to keep forever—America—taking it from the famous Italian Amerigo Vespucci's Christian name (see the most recent study: G. Arciniegas, *Amerigo and the New World*, 1955), was the man to make the first attempt towards transforming the Ptolemaic line of our coast into a live and realistic coastal profile (see *Imago Mundi* V, p. 46).

Thus also the Rhipaean myth and the mountains themselves had to end in collapse, unless one takes into account a belated attempt to make their last stand at the Urals (Miechow-Miechowita). The dramatically legendary end of these mountains has not yet been properly described; it may, however, become some day the subject of an attractive lecture.

Although they do not belong to the theme of this little book, I cannot refrain from quoting at least a few words and sentences

¹⁶ Cf. my books *Alt-Riga*, 1927; p. 118 sq., and *Latvieši un Livonija 16. g.s.*, 1934, p. 112.

¹⁷ R. V. Tooley, *Maps and Map Makers*, 2nd ed., 1952; p. 26: "Waldseemüller . . . was he who first suggested, in his *Cosmographiæ Introductio*, 1507, that the name America should be applied to the New World, after Amerigo Vespucci. Waldseemüller's more solid achievement was the compilation of a large map of the world in 1507", cf. also p. 110. The title of this map: *Universalis Cosmographia secundum Ptolemaei traditionem et Americi Vespuccii aliorumque lustrationes* indicated "Waldseemüller's two-fold sources" (R. A. Skelton, *Decorative Printed Maps of the 15th to 18th centuries*, 1952; p. 35n.).

from this peculiar, yet unwritten chapter of the unique history of our shores.

The first "revolt" against the Rhipaeans seems to have come from Italy, where the changes brought about by the 16th century in the part hitherto played by the Mediterranean were felt acutely. Indeed, what a downfall and with what consequences (from the commercial aspect alone) for the central, intercontinental sea of the ancient world, to be changed into a local, almost internal sea, whose shores might never again see the rise of great empires!

Already at the beginning of this century, Paulus Jovius (Italian *Giovio*)¹⁸, one of the great names of that period, a historian in the humanist style and a biographer-eulogist, as he is usually defined, describing his first contact in Italy with the Muscovite ambassador, comes to conclusions which can already be sensed, as regards our interests, from the title of his account: "*The Book of Paulus Jovius concerning the embassy of Prince Basilius III of Muscovy to Pope Clement VII* (he reigned from 1523 to 1534. A. Sp.). In this book the truth is told about those regions which were unknown to the ancients, about the beliefs and customs of the people of these regions and about the scope of the embassy itself. Furthermore, it shows the mistake of Strabo, Ptolemy and other geographers who mention the Rhipaean mountains: it is clearly stated that in our days such mountains exist nowhere. Is this formula not a clear one? At their first contact with reality, the legends of centuries go up in smoke! It remains for the Muscovite ambassador Demetrius, who was supposed to be a very learned man possessing a knowledge of Latin—rare in a Muscovite because "in his youth he had gone to school in Livonia and acquired there the foundations of his knowledge, and later had filled various diplomatic missions," (Jovius's words. A. Sp.)—it only remains for this man to narrate something about his country . . . and the folio of ancient geography must be closed for ever. I will not dwell on what the valuable Jovius has to say on the style of Tacitus's *De Germania*; I will only mention the part in which he relates that the River Volga has its source in the vast

¹⁸ Quoted from the known edition Ramusio, *Navigazioni et viaggi*, 2nd, ed., 1574.

marshes above Moscow, and that “the Rhipaeian and Hyperborean mountains, much discussed by ancient authors, are nothing but a delusion (*penitus fabulosos esse*)”. A less important man also writes to the same Pope Clement VII, on the very same subject: he would not even think of sparing derogatory phrases such as: “fabulous mountains”, “deceitful Greece”, “shameless geographers”, *etc.*¹⁹

In Central and Eastern Europe things did not happen quite so fast. The famous cosmographer and cartographer Seb. Münster states plainly that the mountains mentioned by ancient cosmographers are a fiction; and also the belief that the big Eastern European rivers spring from them (first edition, 1550. A. Sp.). The no less famous Baron Herberstein, the German Emperor’s envoy to Moscow, also writes that the River Don does not originate in the Rhipaeian mountains, but in a huge lake (*ex Iuvanovuosero*). He has an original tale, too, about Alexander the Great’s altars (they gave no peace to Jovius either):²⁰ “But I have not been able to find out anything about the altars of Alexander and Caesar, or their ruins, which from the testimonies of so many authors should be in this vicinity, neither from the local inhabitants, nor from other people familiar with these places. Also the soldiers which the Prince (*i.e.*, Grand Duke of Moscow, A. Sp.) keeps permanently, each year, in the local garrison, in order that they may study and repel any Tartar incursions, when questioned by me on this matter, answered that they had neither seen nor heard anything of it. However, they did not deny having seen some sort of marble or stone statues and figures . . . near the estuary of the Little Don.”

Loyalty to ancient tradition together with the modern spirit of investigation—is not this symbiosis touching indeed?

¹⁹ Cf. note 18.

²⁰ *Rerum Moscoviticarum Commentarii*, 1st ed. Vienna 1549. His map on Muscovy is reproduced in my book *Latvieši un Livonija*, p. 112.

The renowned Polish geographer of the 16th century, Miechow, seems to sustain the main battle against the Rhipaeen mountains. He has been mentioned and quoted in my article in the *Imago Mundi* (1948).²¹

²¹ Those problems are dealt with in my cartographic studies, where several old maps of Ancient Livonia are reproduced; in those maps the reader can examine the different shapes of the Rhipaeen Mountains.

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