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Author: Alfred Twardecki

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Olbia in the Hunnic Time. A Historical Perspective

Alfred Twardecki^a

In this paper, the author presents the historical background of the period of functioning of the site of Olbia in the Gothic and Hunnic periods. He presents the most important studies on the Goths and Huns in recent decades, reconstructs the course of the Gothic wars (third to sixth centuries) and analyses selected sagas of Germanic mythology. On the basis of this and using the results of the recent archaeological excavations, he formulates the thesis that Olbia, functioning in the Gothic period from the 3rd/4th centuries to the beginning of the 5th century AD, could have been an important administrative centre of pagan Goths who actively fought against their Christianized brethren. He also hypothesizes that it can be identified with the land of Oium (Olbiūm) and with the *Árheimar á Danparstæðum*, the capital of *Reiðgotaland*, mentioned in the oldest Germanic sagas.

KEY-WORDS: *Árheimar*, Attila, Cherniakhiv culture, Goths, Huns, Istria, Oium, Olbia Pontica, Roman Empire, Tyras, Jordanes, Ammianus Marcellinus

INTRODUCTION

The story of Olbia in the Hunnic period is a new chapter in the history of this archaeological site. All previous publications – both archaeological, historical and philological – dealing with this region and era have not considered the existence of ancient Olbia as a large settlement centre after 375 (the date of the invasion of the Huns and the death of Hermanaric). This is a first and very preliminary attempt to review our historical knowledge with this in mind. Already during the initial search of the sources, it turned out that literary sources are extremely scarce for Olbia itself and the nearby areas in the period of interest to us. Firstly, it is a period beyond the scope of the work of Ammianus Marcellinus – the last serious historian of the ancient period. The work

^a Institute of Archaeology and Ethnology, Polish Academy of Sciences, Al. Solidarności 105, 00-140 Warsaw, Poland; e-mail: a.twardecki@iaepan.edu.pl; ORCID 0000-0002-0380-3058

of Jordanes, which is a very important source for the history of Goths, could be only partly useful as it primarily concentrates on the history of the Goths in the context of Roman, not Hunnic, history. What's more, while quite a lot of information about the Goths can be found, information about the Huns appears much less often in late antique texts. In addition, Olbia and the surrounding area fell outside the direct control of Rome relatively early (that is, at the beginning of the second half of the 3rd century), and therefore there are virtually no literary references to Olbia from this period. It is therefore necessary to re-read the most important literary sources from between the third and sixth centuries, considering the new information obtained during the recent archaeological excavations in Olbia. This work turned out to be very tedious and not very fruitful, although necessary to obtain a broader picture of the role of Olbia – or rather the Gothic settlement functioning in its place during this period. Some of the conclusions based on this new examination result from the historical context reading between the lines and certainly must be carefully verified at further stages of research. Nevertheless, even if not all conclusions turn out to be ultimately correct, at this stage of research, it is worth presenting the widest possible spectrum of them to subject them to a wide criticism of specialists from various fields. Therefore, it seems necessary to divide the article into two parts. The first one will discuss the most important historical events covering the period of the so-called Gothic Wars (261–554). In the second, I will try to summarize the collected information and draw conclusions about the history of Olbia itself.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Research history

The literature on the history and archaeology of the Goths is enormous and there is no space here to discuss it in full. Nevertheless, I feel obliged to present the studies on which I based the picture of Gothic history presented below, with particular emphasis on the areas on the Black Sea and contacts with Rome. The works of two writers in particular and the discussion between them have had an important influence on the course of the history of the Goths presented below. The first are the works of Michael Kulikowski of Pennsylvania State University (Kulikowski 2006) the second is Peter Heather of King's College London (Heather 1991; 2005; 2010). Especially inspiring was the evolution of Heather's position – from an initial critique of Jordanes to a reluctant retraction of some objections under the influence of archaeological data.

I cannot fail to mention outstanding Polish researchers of the history of the Goths, whose works have shaped my image of the Goths while still a student or just after

graduating. This is a monograph by an prominent Polish historian from Wrocław, Professor Tadeusz Kotula (1994), and a very inspiring work on the Gothic War of Claudius II by Professor Jerzy Strzelczyk from Poznań (Strzelczyk 1984).

Russian- and Ukrainian-language literature on the Goths is equally extensive and interesting. Here, however, most articles and books summarize the results of excavations conducted – mainly in Ukraine – at Cherniakhiv culture sites. Nevertheless, some of them contain extremely interesting synthetic summaries that go beyond a simple account of excavations or analysis of excavation material – such as, for example, the publications of Boris Magomedov or Oleh Petrauskas. This applies too to those included in the present volume of *Archaeologia Polona*. Magomedov's thesis is particularly interesting here, as he sees Gothic Olbia as the seat of one of the Gothic "princes" (Magomedov 2020 and his paper published in this volume). In a sense, some considerations presented below are a (significant) modification and development of this thesis. The most interesting attempt to broaden the history of the Goths was made by Vera Budanova from Moscow (1990). This is a very useful publication summarizing the analysis of ancient written sources and presenting Western literature on the Goths until 1990. There are a number of interesting reflections by the author in that text, but they are not related to the topic of the article. Budanova is also a supporter of the multi-ethnic nature of the state of the Goths and Huns, and a supporter of the thesis that the realm of Hermanaric was a confederation of local Germanic chiefs under the leadership of Hermanaric, rather than a true state entity. The book by Mark Shchukin (2005), a representative of the Saint Petersburg school of historians, presents a comprehensive and extremely captivating picture of the history and culture of the Goths. The author, an archaeologist, begins his narrative with considerations about the beginnings of the Wielbark culture and ends with the fall of the last independent Gothic states in Crimea after its conquest by the Ottoman Turks and the forced resettlement of the remnants of the population in 1799 by Catherine II. The book had a great influence on the formation of views on the history of the Goths among Russian-speaking researchers. Shchukin accepts the thesis about the multiculturalism of the Goths and devotes a lot of attention to problems related to the synchronization of archaeological data and written sources. His vision of Gothic culture is indeed very interesting. The book was published before Kulikowski's key publication and although it sometimes contains similar doubts, Kulikowski's publication, in my opinion, delve deeper into the issues. Another useful book on the Goths published in Russian is the doctoral thesis of Irina V. Zin'kovskaya (2010). Zin'kovskaya's publication is devoted to the analysis of mainly written sources about the phenomenon of the Hermanaric state. Archaeological sources are quoted there basing on secondary publications only. Nevertheless, it is an excellent place to get acquainted with the Russian- and Ukrainian-language literature on the subject until 2010.

One of the most important contentious issues between researchers of the history of the Goths and the Migration of Peoples in general was the question of the ethnogenesis of the tribes that had been wandering through the area between the Baltic and Black Seas since the 3rd century. The point of contention centred on assigning the main role to the Germanic tribes in these events (Heather is perhaps the most prominent contemporary representative of this position) as opposed to considering a broader spectrum of peoples participating in the migrations. In the latter case, Kulikowski is probably the most important representative of this position (Kulikowski 2009), which was manifested, among other things, in his replacement of the term Germans with the term “barbarians”. I am closer to Kulikowski’s position on this point, and I am convinced that both the character of the “Gothic” and “Hun” states were multi-ethnic in practice with only a leading role of both mentioned ethnicities, who were probably minorities (Kulikowski 2010: 279; despite criticism by some other scholars, for example Ward-Perkins 2009). This is also evidenced by objects of material culture found during our excavations. The results of the work on the R-23 excavation brought both artefacts clearly identified with the Cherniakhiv and even Wielbark culture, together with a lot of imports from the Black Sea and Mediterranean basins, as well as local products (Twardecki and Buiskikh 2020 – see also the papers presented in this volume).

The discussion between Kulikowski and Heather on at least some of the causes of the fall of the western part of the Roman Empire was also extremely inspiring for the construction of my hypotheses. Kulikowski strongly criticizes Heather’s thesis about the invasion of the Huns as one of those factors leading to the collapse (Kulikowski 2006: 206; cf., Sinor 1990: 177). I share the opinion that the invasion of the Huns had a great impact on the fate of the Roman Empire and the fall of its western part. Anyway, not wanting to make a final judgment here and go into too detailed source analysis (also because the political context of the discussion about the role of the Goths goes back even to the ideas of Gustaf Kossinna), which would probably consume the whole predefined by the editors frame of the volume for this article, I feel the need to define my position in this dispute due to the historical and cultural context of the hypotheses presented below. There is a much more modest body of literature devoted to the Huns and the history of their almost one hundred years of dominance east of the Danube and the Rhine. Here, undoubtedly, Heather’s works quoted above retain their value as well as general and encyclopaedic texts such as Sinor (1990) or multi-authored publications, such as that edited by Michael Maas (2015) as well as the earlier but still fundamental posthumous publication of the manuscript of Otto J. Maenchen-Helfen (1973 or extended German translation: 1978). In recent years Hyun Jin Kim of Melbourne (Kim 2013; 2015; 2017) has shown a quite new perspective in his publications. He vehemently rejects the image of the Huns as savage barbarians who became civilized through contact with the Germans and Romans.

He claims that the Huns reached a refined level of political culture during their migration through Central Asia and were far from passive recipients of the splendour of Western civilization. Moreover, he states that the culture of medieval Europe owes much to the achievements of Hunnic culture. This iconoclastic thesis caused a wide resonance in the research community researching both late antiquity and the Middle Ages.

One of the fundamental controversies in the study of the history of the Huns is their origin and ethnic identification. While the question of whether the Huns were descendants of the Xiongnu is not of major importance for our considerations about Olbia, the political organization of their state is. Kim (2015: 46) for example, believes that the term “Huns” originally had a political, not ethnic, context and meant some type of confederation repeating the older Maenchen-Helfen hypothesis (Maenchen-Helfen 1959: 237). The multi-ethnic nature of the Hun state also seems to be confirmed by recent genetic research (Gnecchi-Ruscone *et al.*, 2022). Therefore, I assume that, like the state of the Goths, the state of the Huns was also multi-ethnic. Archaeological (Godłowski 1991 – if we follow the interpretation of Harmatta 1951; László 1951) and written (Priscus – Given 2014) sources also seem to indicate that the system of political power in the Huns’ state was based on specific principles of vassal relationships.

Historical timeline (235–554)

The beginning of the so-called Gothic Wars is usually set at 248, when the Goths first crossed the Danube under Cniva. The Romans made the first contacts with the Goths, however, at least more than 10 years earlier (Strzelczyk 1984: 87; Kotula 1994: 71), possibly due to them causing a threat to Olbia in the last years of Alexander Severus’ (222–235). After the assassination of Alexander Severus, the next Emperor (Maximin Trax) agreed to support them with a subsidy due to the famine prevailing among the Goths. Emperor Decius withheld this aid and this was the pretext for the invasion led by Cniva. The last chord of the Gothic Wars is the campaign conducted during the reign of Justinian I in 535–554. It was intended to recapture the whole of Italy and although it was initially successful, in 568 the Byzantines lost control of a large part of the peninsula because of a successful invasion by the Lombards. As we can see, the struggle of the Romans with the Goths lasted about 300 years and ended in the victory of the latter, at least in the western part of the former Empire.

The first armed clash between the Romans and the Goths took place during the reign of Emperor Decius and ended with a rather unexpected rout of the Roman army in the battle of Abritus (251). The emperor himself, his son and successor Herennius Etruscus, and a large part of the Roman military elite died in this battle. These events defined the fate of the territories beyond the Danube for the next 200 years. Rome lost direct control over them, and they became an area of intense Gothic colonization. This included at Olbia itself.

After twenty years of minor raids into Roman territory, the next act of the drama is the great invasion of Rome by the Goths in 268. In this period appears a new quality in Gothic forces – seaborne raids (Zosimus 1971–1989, 1: 31 ff). This is especially interesting in the context of Olbia, because the Gothic fleet should have had their naval bases, however, Zosimus informs us that the Bosporan Kingdom was the probable source of the naval skills obtained by the Goths (Zosimus 1971–1989, 1: 32 ff). This time, however, the decisive battle of Naissus ended with the rout of the Goths. Here, the connection with the history of the Gothic settlement in Olbia is not so obvious and, perhaps, we are dealing with an accidental synchronism. The battle of Naissus, although it did not undo the consequences of the defeat at Abritus, stopped the larger invasions of the Goths on Rome for 100 years. At that time, between the Danube and the Dnipro, settlements of the Cherniakhiv culture flourished, including in former Olbia.

The strategic situation in the areas east of the Danube changed dramatically in 375, when the Huns rapidly subjugated first the Alans and then the Goths – first Greuthungs and then the Thervinges (Ammianus Marcellinus 1935–1940, 31: 3; Zosimus 1971–1989, 4: 20 ff; Philostorgius 1981, 9: 17; Kulikowski 2006: 124–128). During the fights with the Huns, Hermanaric died, his large state was crushed, and thousands of refugees appeared on the border of the Roman Empire on the Danube.

Let's pause for a moment on the sequence of events at this point. The question arises: what role could a possible settlement of the Cherniakhiv culture in Olbia have played at that time? And why, after a significant part of the Goths had fled to the west from the Huns, did this settlement, as we know from archaeological data, not collapse? Not only that, but to judge from the increase in imported pottery, it experienced a period of relative prosperity. Was it because Olbia was located at an important crossroads of land and water routes? (Fig. 1).

Modern researchers count the number of Gothic refugees at about 20,000 warriors with 100,000 civilians (Heather 2005: 145–507) or even only 90,000 people (Cambridge Ancient History 1998: 98). Valens agreed to transport them to the Roman side of the Danube, which started the course of events that led to the fall of Rome and what Ammianus Marcellinus predicted in bitter words (Ammianus Marcellinus 1935–1940, 31: 4).

The situation very quickly got out of control of Emperor Valens. The Goths, led by Fritigern, rebelled and brought in reinforcements from the east bank of the Danube, by this time out of Roman control. The fate of Rome and the Goths was decided in the battle of Adrianople, where Valens fell and the Roman army was smashed to ashes (Ammianus Marcellinus 1935–1940: 31,13). In the eastern part of the empire, there was an interregnum in the country, mass executions of previously settled Goths



Fig. 1. Olbia at the crossroads of the water and land routes by M. Maciejczyk. Source of map: ©Google Maps.

began – both soldiers and civilians. The situation was stabilized only by Theodosius I. In 382, peace was concluded with the Goths, which defined relations in this part of the world for the next decades.

The right of the Goths to settle in the Roman Empire was confirmed and they were granted autonomy as *foederati*. Themistius (Oratio 16 and 34) proclaimed in his speeches that a major success had been achieved and that in time the Goths would assimilate with Rome, as did the Galatians before them. History was soon to show that these hopes were unrealistic. For the Goths, it was the beginning of the process that transformed the Thervings into Visigoths and at the same time intensified the process of their Christianization. Emperor Constantius II and Valens professed Arianism and the Goths adopted Christianity in this rite (Rubin 1981). Adherence to Arianism, later condemned by the mainstream of the church, was an additional element that strengthened the sense of separateness of the Goths living within the Roman Empire. At the same time, the adoption of Christianity by some of the Gothic elites led to a sharp conflict with the Goths who adhered to the old pagan customs – especially those living east of the Danube.

The next stage of the Gothic wars took place shortly after the death in January 395 of Emperor Theodosius which changed the balance of power fundamentally

(Rousseau 1992; Kienast *et al.*, 2017). Alaric, Gothic chieftain, invaded Italy in 401 and made a deal in 404 that allowed him to use the resources of the Western Empire in Pannonia. At this time (405), the Western Empire had to face another invasion of the Goths led by Radagaisus. This is perhaps a very important event for a better understanding of Olbia's role at that time. "[...] Rhodogaisus [Ῥοδογαῖσος], having collected four hundred thousand of the Celts, and the German tribes that dwell beyond the Danube and the Rhine, made the preparations for passing over into Italy.¹" (Zosimus 1814: 5.26.3), and did not hide his pagan beliefs: *Radagaisus* [...] *hic supra hanc incredibilem multitudinem indomitamque uirtutem paganus et Scythae erat, qui, ut mos est barbaris huiusmodi gentibus, omnem Romani generis sanguinem dis suis propinare deuouerat* (Orosius 1889: 7, 37.4–5). The invasion ended in complete defeat and extermination of the forces of Radagaisus in 406. At the head of the Roman army was Stilicho, Alaric's adversary, while the latter watched the events without intervening on either side. In addition to the Germanic invasions, the Huns under Uldin attacked in the south. Uldin, who at that time ruled approximately the territory of today's Muntenia (Wallachia), had just (400) captured, killed, and sent back to Constantinople the head of the Gothic rebel Gainas. After this, he invaded the western part of the Roman Empire (406) but was "convinced" by Stilicho to help destroy the army of Radagaisus.

In 407, there was another, as mentioned above, invasion of the Empire by the Germans. This time they crossed the Rhine (probably a reason for Zosimus' confusion with the incursion of Radagaisus). At the same time, a rebellion broke out in Britain. This opened the possibility of another invasion of Italy for Alaric (strongly reinforced by the followers of Radagaisus). Stilicho paid tribute to Alaric for abandoning the invasion to keep his hands untied for problems in Gaul and Britain. However, this greatly weakened his position at the court of Emperor Honorius. There was a coup against him at the Imperial court while he was travelling with a small escort of Goths and Huns. After the death of Stilicho, the persecution of the Goths began in the area controlled by Honorius, which led to a mass flight of thousands of warriors with their families to Noricum, to Alaric. Rome was deprived of its only effective military force and Alaric re-entered Italy (408). Further events show that Alaric, step by step, changed his political status in the Empire: first he defended the persecuted Goths, then demanded a ransom, later appointing Priscus Attalus as counter-emperor, and finally crossing another red line in 410 by the sack of Rome.

The Goths became an open and unquestioned independent player in the political arena. The rule of Alaric, who soon died (411), is considered by some researchers as the beginning of the constitution of the division into Visigoths and Ostrogoths

1 In Greek: *ἐκ τῶν ὑπὲρ τὸν Ἴστρον καὶ τὸν Πῆγον Κελτικῶν τε καὶ Γερμανικῶν ἔθνων ἐς τεσσαράκοντα συναγαγὼν μυριάδας.*

in place of the previous dynastic divisions. Now the fundamental division was between the Goths, who formed increasingly independent political organisms within the Roman Empire, and those who remained outside its borders. The period of the next several decades is the time of solidification of the Gothic and, more broadly, Germanic states in the Western Empire, and at the same time an extremely important period in the history of Olbia, which in the 430s becomes deserted. Simultaneously the settlements of the Cherniakhiv culture in the Dnipro basin are also abandoned. When another Roman-Gothic conflict on a larger scale occurs in 458, there are no longer any Goths in most of the area around Olbia. Nevertheless, for the sake of consistency of the narrative, I will briefly present the most important historical events, because they undoubtedly played a role in the creation of later sources, i.e., written long after the abandonment of Olbia. They will help to understand the attitude of the authors to the described events and better interpret the information they provide.

The situation of the Goths changed during Emperor Majorian's war against Theodoric II. In 458, Majorian defeated Theodoric II, restored Roman control over southern France and part of Spain, and forced the Visigoths to retreat to Aquitaine and re-recognize the status of *foederati*, i.e., in practice the suzerainty of Rome. Certainly, these successes, albeit temporary, may have influenced the anti-Gothic attitude of some writers of the period. Shortly after Majorian's death in 461, Theodoric regained control of southern France and became actively involved in matters relating to the succession to the throne of the late emperor. After the assassination of Theodoric II by his brother Euric in 466, the latter reunited the Visigoths during the following years of his reign and extended control back to part of Spain.

During these dramatic events in the west, there was also a crisis in the state of the Huns, which included the Ostrogoths. The reign of Attila (434–453) was most likely followed by a spectacularly successful reign of the Ostrogoths. At Nedao (453), probably in Pannonia, they defeated the Huns and gained independence. Also in Pannonia, the Ostrogoths, under the rule of the Amal dynasty, began to create, in the footsteps of the Visigoths, an independent state under Theodoric the Great (471–526). Meanwhile, in 476, another, more symbolic than actual, event took place – the dethronement of the emperor Romulus Augustulus by Odoacer, a barbarian chieftain (maybe of Hunnic origin). Rome falls in 476 and is only a mark of a long historical process and still, history continues. As a result of the diplomatic efforts of the Byzantine emperor Zeno, the Ostrogoths invaded Italy, defeated Odoacer and established in 493 their own kingdom in Italy.

After Theodoric's death in 526, the last act of the Roman-Gothic Wars took place. Emperor Justinian tried to take advantage of an interregnum period and launched a military campaign with an ambitious plan to recover Italy and the rest of the Western

Empire. During this almost 20-year campaign (535–554), Justinian’s generals managed to recapture most of the territories. Nevertheless, the invasion of the Lombards in 568 forced the Byzantines to accept the loss of power in the northern part of Italy. Justinian in his restoration of the Empire started with attacking Vandals in 533 and then in 535 started the Gothic War to reconquest Italy, which lasted nearly 20 years. That was of course the reason that he insisted that historians picture the rule of the Goths as illegitimate.

For the research on Olbia in the Gothic and Hunnic periods, these events are important in that the military action was followed by propaganda activities undermining the legitimacy of the Goths’ rule in the areas of the former Roman Empire. This was the time in which Jordanes lived and wrote (Heather 1991: 47–49 opt for 552 years for the plague mentioned by Jordanes in *Getica* 104 but Goffart 1988: 98 for the year 554 however, most scholars now tend to date it to 541–549: cf., Eisenberg and Mordechai 2019 about literature of the subject) and his work can be interpreted as a response to the Byzantine propaganda that diminished the role and importance of the Goths in the history of the last few hundred years.

Archaeological timeline

The chronology of the Cherniakhiv culture generally accepted by archaeologists is somewhat problematic when compared to the narrative of historians built mainly based on Greco-Roman written sources. The first problem is that historians and archaeologists use different chronological systems. Archaeologists use a system based on the analysis of ceramic vessels, which are the most frequently found type of artefacts during excavations. This system is based on the work of Gorokhovskiyi (1988) with later improvements. The essence of the discrepancy is that historians are used to using terms such as “the first quarter of the century,” while archaeologists sometimes divide the century into three parts.

Similarly, the phases of the Cherniakhiv culture are divided by archaeologists into several stages marked with Roman numerals, which in the base publication (Gorokhovskiyi 1988) were of course dated according to years, but in a large part of archaeological publications, the authors most often work within the framework of relative chronology (marked with Roman numerals). If we add to this the evolution in absolute dating of individual phases, it will show us the inconvenience of precise synchronization of historical and archaeological data. For these reasons, in the considerations presented below, I provide dates “translated” from “archaeological language” to “historical language” to maintain the coherence of the entire text.

According to archaeological sources – I rely here mainly on the results of excavations in trenches R-23 (Polish-Ukrainian, Twardecki and Buisikh 2020) and R-25 (Ukrainian) – the last traces of Roman presence in Olbia come from excavation

R-25 and date back to the 260s or 270s. Conventionally (historically), researchers set the moment of leaving Olbia by the Romans at around 275. The traces of fire seem to indicate that the end of the Roman presence and the beginning of the Cherniakhiv settlement in Olbia was associated with violence and destruction (Stobbe *et al.*, 2019). This is the *terminus ante quem* the Roman presence in Olbia is archaeologically attested.

The first traces of the presence of items related to the Cherniakhiv culture come from the chronological context dated to the beginning of the 4th century. However, it can be assumed that the settlement of the Goths in Olbia could have started a little earlier or a little later. Two issues should be noted here: 1. the separation of the presence of the Goths in the so-called Lower Town (port) and in the territory of the so-called “Roman Citadel” and 2. discrepancies between individual researchers in this regard.

Boris Magomedov believes that while the Goths could have settled in the Lower Town and Olbia’s vicinity quite early (end of the 3rd–beginning of the 4th centuries) and used this place (Lower Town) as an initially seasonal port, they settled in the “Citadel” area only in the last quarter (last third) of the 4th century (Magomedov in the paper presented in this volume). He bases his theses on the material from earlier excavations in Olbia. Didenko, however, believes that the Goths settled in the “Citadel” area already at the beginning of the 4th century (Didenko in the paper presented in this volume). This date is based on the analysis of ceramics obtained from Polish-Ukrainian excavations in Trench R-23 as well as recent work carried out in Trench R-25. Personally, I am more inclined to the dating presented by Serhii Didenko.

In such a case, after the destruction resulting from the evacuation of the Roman garrison in the 270s or a little earlier, we would first be dealing with the destruction of Olbia (fire layer) and then its gradual settlement at the end of the 3rd or beginning of the 4th century (290–315 – my “translation” into “historical language”). I also do not agree with the separation of settlements in the Lower Town and the vicinity of Olbia from those in the “Citadel” area. There are many indications that already in the early 4th century, Olbia was a settlement of the Cherniakhiv culture and a production and trade centre (Twardecki and Buisikh 2020 and a major part of the papers presented in this volume).

The analyses of our works so far show that the Goths broke the architectural (and probably also cultural) continuity with the settlement network of the Roman period. It can be assumed that a completely new settlement was established in Graeco-Roman Olbia, which broke with the earlier character of the city (see the text by Alla Buisikh presented in this volume; also that by Boris Magomedov also in this volume). In short, from the end of the 3rd century there is no mention of Olbia, but a Gothic settlement existed, perhaps even with a different name. The 3rd/4th centuries are the period of development of this settlement (Figs 2, 3). After the invasion

Olbia 2021
Trench R23
 Plan 3: Occupation Surface
 Scale:1:50
 Date:05.08.2021
 Photo: A.Twardecki
 Processing: M.Antos,

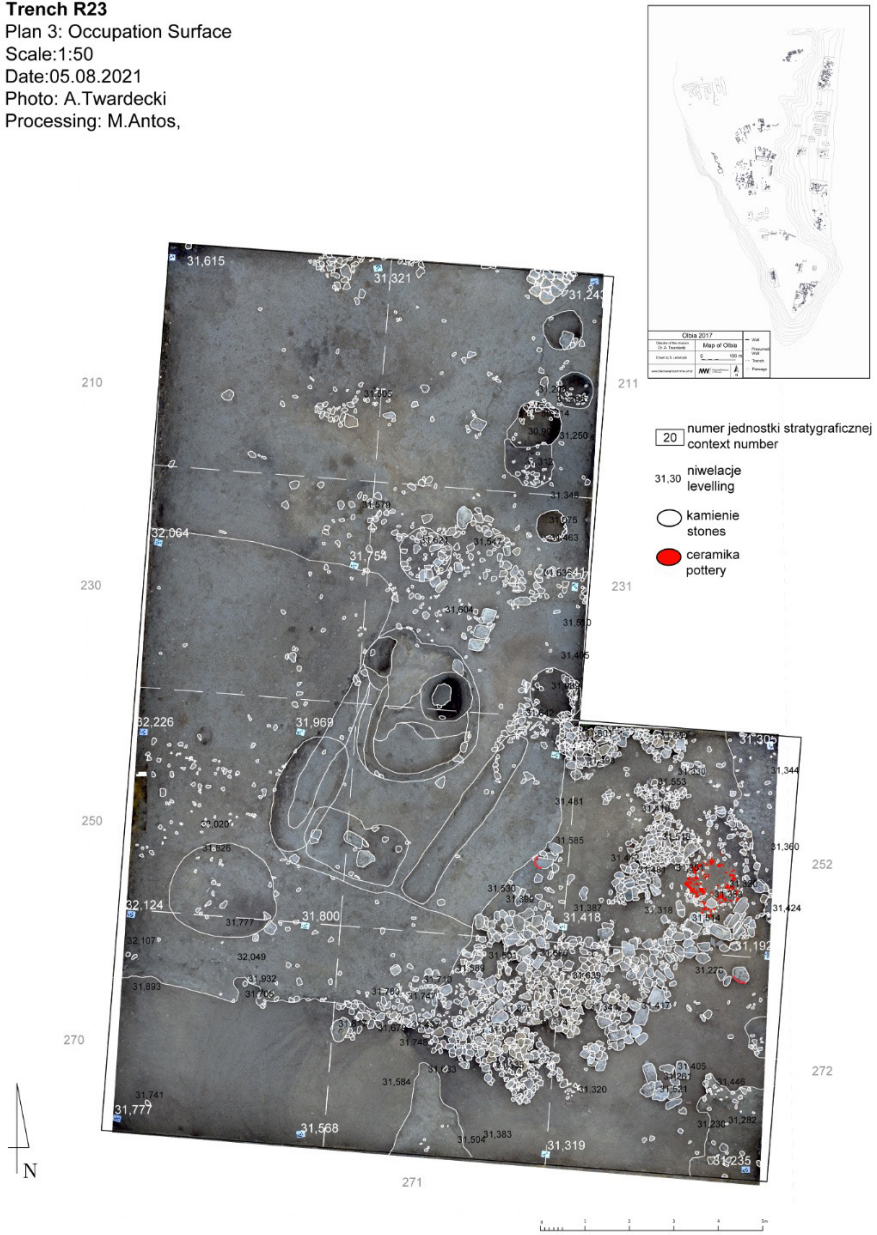


Fig. 2. Plan of Trench R-23 at the end of the season 2021 with constructions of the Cherniakhiv culture. Authors: A. Twardecki and M. Antos.



Fig. 3. Trench R-23. A close-up of the presumed rooms of the Cherniakhiv culture constructions with the floor covered with broken ceramics. Author: A. Twardecki.

of the Huns in 375, there is even a period of prosperity – an increase in the number of imported ceramics (Didenko in the paper presented in this volume). The final abandonment of the settlement takes place around the 30s of the 5th centuries (Magomedov in the paper presented in this volume; Didenko in the paper presented in this volume).

In the last-Hunnic phase of the existence of the settlement in former Olbia (circa 375–circa 430), we are faced with another controversy between scholars. Boris Magomedov (in the paper presented in this volume) is of the opinion that not only the fortifications at the “Citadel” but also the entire system of former fortifications were rebuilt at that time. Alla Buiskykh, however, sees no signs of such extensive reconstruction of the fortifications (Buiskykh in the paper presented in this volume). In this case, Magomedov’s position is closer to me (see below the analysis of the Germanic myths), despite the lack of traces of renovation of the citadel’s defensive walls in the post-Roman period. This may be due to the state of research, although it cannot be definitively ruled out that Alla Buiskykh is right in this matter.

An extremely interesting issue is also the differences that exist in the opinions of historians and archaeologists regarding the scope of the state of Hermanaric, i.e., the scope of Gothic influence at the apogee of the political power of the Goths (the Cherniakhiv culture and the Sântana de Mureş culture, but also the Wielbark

culture). Some historians (see above), for example Wolfram (1990; 1997) have suggested that the rule of Hermanaric extended even to the Ural mountains. Meanwhile, archaeologists have found confirmation of the settlement of the Cherniakhiv culture only up to the border marked in the east by the Siverskyi Donets river (Lyubichev and Myzgin 2014). In my opinion, both views can be reconciled by assuming the border of the Cherniakhiv settlement around the Siverskyi Donets, while Hermanaric's political control could have extended further east, to peoples of non-Gothic origin. Without going into a detailed discussion, it should be stated that Olbia was undoubtedly located in a strategically key place and on the border separating the influence of the Thervings and Greuthungs (Fig. 1).

CHRISTIANIZATION OF THE GOTHS

After the adoption of Christianity in the 4th century by some Goths, there were also persecutions of Germanic followers of this religion by pagan kinsmen. Written sources provide information about the persecution initiated by Athanaric. One of the persecutors of Christians known by name was Vinguric (e.g., Sozomenus 1960: 6, 37). However, since the Christianized Goths could have been perceived as supporters of Rome, this persecution could also have had political reasons (cf., Rubin 1981; Wolfram 1990: 83; Szada 2020).

The peace concluded with the Goths by Theodosius in 382 was probably another milestone in the history of the Gothic settlement in Olbia. A large part of the Goths settled permanently within the Roman Empire and most of them accepted Christianity over time. Meanwhile, in Gothic Olbia, we find virtually no traces of Christianization at that time. It can therefore be assumed that here, as in neighbouring Tyras, the inhabitants continued to adhere to the old, pagan customs. This connects perfectly with the above-mentioned issue of the invasion of Radagaisus and possibly his connections with *Reiðgotaland*. In this context, the Radagaisus disaster could have meant significant depopulation and the beginning of the end of the importance of this pagan centre in the early 5th century, which in turn would well explain the depopulation of Olbia and the surrounding settlements of the Cherniakhiv culture around the 430s (see archaeological timeline).

GOTHIC MYTHOLOGY

The previously presented description of historical events, based mainly on written sources and archaeological data, should be supplemented with the information we have in Gothic myths. However, before presenting the material, it should be clearly

stated that the nature of mythological sources requires research techniques dramatically different from the two previous types of sources (historical and archaeological). The conclusions that can be drawn from the analysis of myths or epic poetry will always remain much vaguer and more debatable than those drawn by classical philologists, historians, or archaeologists. I leave aside the controversial but extremely interesting issue of myth as a historical source (see e.g., two books presenting opposing approaches to the problem: Eliade 1963 and Nestle 1975). A perfect illustration of my position in that matter is a fragment from the “Introduction” of Christopher Tolkien’s translation of the Saga of Heidrek (Tolkien 1960: XXV; cf., Tolkien 1953–1957): “Though no real agreement has ever been reached on the matter, I believe that the cumulative evidence of the names points to the later fourth or early fifth centuries [...]. I do not think that any of the proposed identifications of the battle in the Norse poem with wars recorded by historians of the Empire has any plausibility at all. However, the old voice may be that we hear in these lines – they contain a legend, not ‘history’ as we understand it. But the matter of legend has roots, however much transformed by poets, and though no actual corresponding event has been found in the meagerly recorded history of those times, and surely never will be, in such things as the ‘grave’ and the ‘stone’ on the banks of the Dnipro one, is probably being taken back a thousand years even beyond Heidrek’s Saga to the burial-place of Gothic kings in south-eastern Europe and the high stone in their chief place, on which the king stepped to have homage done to him in the sight of all the people.” As a comment on this quote, I can only mention the information about finding of at least one (child) burial of the Cherniakhiv culture in the Lower Town of Olbia (Leypunskaya 2006 and critical comments by Krapivina 2013: 79–80). We still have not found the Cherniakhiv culture cemetery in Olbia. It should be noted that I am not a supporter of drawing conclusions that are too far-fetched, and I fully agree with Tolkien’s approach.

THE MANUSCRIPTS

We may examine the three most important Germanic legends in which we can try to find mention of Olbia, although it must be emphasized right away not only that these are not direct references but also scattered mentions can in addition be found in other Germanic sagas.

The *Gutasaga* describes the earliest history of Gotland. We know the text from the manuscript dated to about 1350 AD (Codex Holm. B64). I used the edition by Carl Säve (Gutniska... 1859) with the English translation by Peter Tunstall. The second saga – *Hervararsaga ok Heiðreks* (The Saga of Hervör and Heidrek) – describes wars between Goths and the Huns presumably in the 4th century. We know the text from

two manuscripts: H (AM 544) from about the year 1325 and R (MS 2845) from the 15th century. Both are held in the Stofnun Árna Magnússonar in Reykjavík. There are also other manuscripts – U (R 715) dated to the 17th century and held at the University Library in Uppsala and AM 203 fol held at the Copenhagen University Library. The last one is a copy of the R with some additions from an unknown source being however a common ancestor to the manuscript U (Tolkien 1960: XXIX ff). The third saga of interest here is the *Hlöðskviða* (The Battle of the Goths and Huns or in German *Hunnenschlachtlied*). It tells the story about the conflict between Goths and Huns dated to about 4th–5th centuries. We know the text from manuscripts H (AM 544) and R (MS 2845); these are the same manuscripts as for the Saga of Hervör and Heidrek.

For both the last sagas I have used only Tolkien's translation as commonly regarded as the best possible. The introduction written by the translator was crucial for my interpretation of the text.

THE STORY

The most interesting fragment of the Gutesaga: “Then they went away to Fårö and settled there. They couldn't support themselves in that place, so they went to a certain island off the coast of Estland, called Dagö, and settled there and built a town that can still be seen. But they couldn't support themselves there either, so they went up the river Dvina, up through Russia. They went so far that they came to the land of the Greeks. They asked leave of the Greek king to stay there for the waxing and waning of the moon. The king granted that, thinking it was just for one month. Then after a month, he wanted to send them away, but they answered that the moon waxed and waned forever and always, and so they said they were allowed to stay. Word of this dispute of theirs reached the queen. She said, ‘My lord king, you granted them permission to dwell for the waxing and waning of the moon; now that's forever and always, so you can't take it off them.’ So, they settled there, and live there still, and still have something of our language. In those days, and for long afterwards, men believed in *holt* and *howe* (grove and gravemound), sanctuaries and sacred enclosures, and in the heathen gods. They made offerings of their sons and daughters and cattle, with feasting and drinking” (Gutasagen 2007: 2).

The description of the migration from Riga, through Ruthenia (the manuscript is from the mid-14th century) to the seat of the Greek king, where the Goths settled by deception, corresponds to the northern route from the Baltic to the Black Sea: along the Dvina and then the Dnipro to its mouth. And at the mouth of the Dnipro, the first large Greek city was Olbia. Unfortunately, the Crimea (particularly the Bosporan

Kingdom) and maybe even Constantinople itself are more probable. It is also possible that the original migration route of the Goths – up the Vistula and lateral along the Dniester – was replaced in the saga by the medieval route of the Vikings (including the Gutes) along the Dvina and down the Dniro. However, we are dealing with a myth, and it is difficult to find precision in mythical stories. It is also worth paying attention to the entire next paragraph, only part of which I quote, emphasizing the religious conservatism of the Gutes and their attachment to the old, pagan faith.

The legend itself is interesting because there is still a discussion about the type of relationship between the Goths and the Gutes. In the Germanic sagas there is often no distinction between the two (de Vries 1977: 183 s.v. gothi; Strid 2011: 43ff). This is a very interesting clue that still requires in-depth research. Here I would only like to draw attention to a certain etymological aspect. Despite all doubts, however, there remains the possibility that from the 3rd century at least the Germans also used the northern route to travel by water between the Baltic Sea and the Black Sea. If we accept this position, we could assume a constant flow of Goths strongly motivated by their pagan faith through the northern waterway ending at the mouth of the Dniro. Perhaps the centre of power of the pagan Goths, fighting against their Christianized brethren, was located at the mouth of the waterways connecting the Baltic and the Black Sea (Dvina-Dniro and Vistula-Dniester). Faithfulness to the old faith was supported by new arrivals from the Baltic Sea. At the mouth of the Dniro there was ancient Olbia and at the mouth of the Dniester – Tyras. We can find some clues in subsequent sagas.

I would like to treat the next two sagas similarly selectively *The Saga of King Heidrek the Wise* includes at its end *The Battle of the Goths and Huns*, which is considered one of the oldest sagas in Germanic mythology in general (Tolkien 1960: XXII). We may find clues that will allow us to look with fresh eyes at the Latin and Roman sources and, combined with recent archaeological data, attempt to verify our idea of the role of Olbia in the 4th and 5th centuries. The key issue here is the term *Reiðgotaland*, which appears in many Nordic sagas. Tolkien thus explains the etymology and meaning of the word: “The word *Hræða* as in *Widsith* [old-English poem from the late 10th century – AT] means Goths and is in origin the same name-element as appears in Norse as *Reið-* (earlier *Hreið-*) in *Reiðgotar* and *Reiðgotaland*, the land and people over whom king Heidrek came to rule in the saga. The evidence suggests to me that this name was a poetic, honorific designation of the Goths, of general scope, and not the name of a particular branch or community. In later times Icelandic geographers seem to have conceived *Reiðgotaland* very vaguely, as meaning little more than that if a man travelled eastwards he would cross the borders of Poland and enter *Reiðgotaland*. A Gothic dwelling *á stœðum Danpar*, on the banks of the Dniro, is at least not in complete contradiction to such an idea.”

[Tolkien in footnote 1 quotes the relevant fragments of medieval sagas: *Austr frá Polena er Reiðgotaland*, Hauksbók 155 [...] All the versions of the saga place *Reiðgotaland* to the west of Gardaríki, i.e., Russia (p. 28)].

I would also like to draw attention to the description of the seat of the Goths as located *á stæðum Danpar*. It is worth noting in this context the way classical sources describe the siting of the Greek Olbia, under its equivalent second name: Borystheneis, derived from the Greek name of the river that is today known as the Dniro, e.g., Herodotus (1920: 4, 18) – “whom the Greek colonists on the Hypanis river (who call themselves Olbiopolitae) call Borystheneítai”² and Herodotus (1920: 4, 53) – “the land between these rivers, where the land projects like a ship’s beak, is called Hippolaus’ promontory; a temple of Demeter stands there. The settlement of the Borystheneítai is beyond the temple, on the Hypanis”;³ (cf., Claudius Ptolemaeus 2006: 8, 10, 3).

As pointed out Benedetto Bravo (2021: 24, 40), the oldest place of Greek settlement in the region was described as ὑπὸ τῷ Ὑπάνι, which means “under the Buh” and most likely resulted from the location of the settlement at the mouth of the Buh and then along the liman into the sea. Technically it was since 6th century BC part of the “Olbioupolis” (called also Borystheneis – i.e., Dniro). And again, technically speaking, one might wonder if *á stæðum Danpar* is not in some sense like the Greek version of the description of the location of Olbia/Borystheneis and its areas as being not so much “on the banks of the Dniro” but more “at the mouth of the Dniro”? All the more so because the Greco-Roman Olbia was located in the place where the Buh flows into the Dniro and the estuary begins, through which the waters of both rivers flow to the sea in the area of Ochakiv (ancient *Borystheneis*). In short, it was “at the *Borystheneis*”.

If we return to the saga itself, then the land of the Huns (Tolkien 1960: XXVI) lay to the south (verse 91) and east (verse 77) of the country of the Goths and was separated from it by the *Myrkviðr* forest (Tolkien 1960: XXVI, note 2 and p. 52 – “[...] they rode through the forest called *Myrkviðr*, which divided the land of the Huns from the land of the Goths”) in Norse *mork* (originally “boundary”, cf., modern English *march*) means *forest* (cf., verse 76). This wood-question appears in the context of Heidrek’s grave, which, could not have been far away from the *Árheimar* – capital of the fallen hero. This forest is named in the list of demands of Hlöd – Heidrek’s son of a Hunnic mother and therefore the half-brother of Angantýr. Basically, he demands half of Heidrek’s entire estate as his inheritance and, among other things, also:

2 In Greek: τὸς Ἕλληνας οἱ οἰκόντες ἐπὶ τῷ Ὑπάνι ποταμῷ καλέουσι Βορυσθενείτας, σφέας δὲ αὐτοὺς Ὀλβιοπολίτας (Herodotus 2015).

3 In Greek: τὸ δὲ μετὰ τῶν ποταμῶν τούτων ἐὸν ἔμβολον τῆς χώρας Ἰππόλεω ἄκρη καλέεται, ἐν δὲ αὐτῷ ἱρὸν Δήμητρος ἐν ἰδρύται, πέρην δὲ τοῦ ἱροῦ ἐπὶ τῷ Ὑπάνι Βορυσθενεῖται (Herodotus 2015).

“The renowned forest
That is named Mirkwood (*Myrkviðr*),
The hallowed grave
In Gothland standing,
The fair-wrought stone
Beside the Dniپر (*á stæðum Danpar*)” (Tolkien 1960: 49).

Tolkien himself states that the very concept of the “dark border forest” appears in other Germanic poems and is in several places in Europe (Tolkien 1960: XXVI–XXVII).

Let us abandon the saga for a moment again and look at the description of Olbia and its surroundings in ancient sources. In Herodotus we find information about the land of Hylaia (wooded) separating Olbia from the steppe. “But to the east of these farming Scythians, across the Panticapes river, you are in the land of nomadic Scythians, who plant nothing, nor plough; and all these lands except the Woodlands are bare of trees”⁴ (Herodotus 1920: 4, 19). The location of Hylaia is briefly but precisely described by the anonymous author of *Periplus Ponti Euxini* (after year 6 AD; probably Arrian): “but to the east, beyond the Borysthenes river, there are the Scythians who live in the so-called Hylaia, farmers live above them”⁵ (*Periplus Ponti Euxini* 1965: 49, 9, whose author clearly follows Ephorus from Kyme, 4th century BC). This area was located east of the Dniپر (Borysthenes) and north of the Kinburn Peninsula (Achilleos Dromos – Achilles Racecourse) and west of today’s city of Skadovsk at the entrance to the Crimean Peninsula. Approximately it is the eastern part of the present Kherson oblast. It owes its name – “wooded” – to the existence of a dense forest in this area, which is confirmed in many other ancient sources. Again, I would not like to reach too far-reaching conclusions here, but I would like to draw attention to a certain convergence of topographic descriptions. Even more so because both in the Germanic sagas themselves and among researchers there is no consensus as to the location of the area where the Goths and the Huns clashed. However, I accept Tolkien’s position here, which (though far from being final), favours the location on the Black Sea and not, for example, on the Vistula (Tolkien 1960: XXVII).

However, let us return to the text of the saga and look at the fragment in which the name of the capital of the Goths appears. After Heidrek’s death, his son Angantýr takes revenge on the assassins, takes – Tyrfring, his father’s magic sword, from

4 In Greek: τὸ δὲ πρὸς τὴν ἠῶ τῶν γεωργῶν τούτων Σκυθέων διαβάντι τὸν Παντικᾶπην ποταμὸν νομάδες ἤδη Σκύθαι νέμονται, οὔτε τις σπείροντες οὔδὲ νοῦτε ἀροῦντες ψιλὴ δὲ δενδρέων ἢ πᾶσα αὐτὴ πλὴν τῆς Ὑλαιῆς (Herodotus 2015).

5 In Greek: πρὸς ἀνατολὰς δὲ ἐκβάντι τὸν Βορυσθένην ποταμὸν, τοὺς τὴν λεγομένην Ὑλαιαν οἰκοῦντας Σκύθας εἶναι, Γεωργοὺς δ’ ἐχομένους τούτων ἄνω.

them and returns to his father's residence to give a funeral feast. At this moment the *Battle between the Goths and the Huns* begins: "And now Angantýr returned home, and immediately afterwards he had a great funeral feast held at the place called *Árheimar*, on the banks of the Dnipro (*á Danpar stæðum*), to honour the memory of his father" (Tolkien1960: 46). Then arrives Hlöd:

"Hlöd rode from the east,
Heir of Heidrek,
He came to the court
Claiming his birthright,
To *Árheimar*,
The homes of the Goths" (Tolkien1960: 47).

There have been several attempts to locate *Árheimar* (Pritsak 1981; 1993; Dzhakson 2001: 81, 82), but it seems that we encounter a fundamental insurmountable obstacle here: the nature of the myth or epic does not allow it to be treated as a typical historical source. With this reservation, however, an attempt can be made to interpret the information contained in the above-quoted fragments. First, I would understand *á Danpar stæðum* as Dniprostead, which slightly differs from "at/on the banks of Dnipro" and interpret it more as "at the Dnipro side" rather than "at the banks of Dnipro". Secondly, I would add the exact translation of the *Árheimar* as a "river home", when that river is the *Danpar*. So, as a consequence of such interpretations of the sources, we could have *Árheimar* as a river home at the side of Dnipro. Taking all this into account, I would like to add Olbia as an alternative to previous proposals for its location (Kamianka-Dniprovska, Kyiv). Let's get back to the saga. The war begins and in the spring the Hunnic army crosses the border forest (*Myrkviðr*) – "and when they came out of the forest, they were in a land of broad populous tracts and level plains. On the plains stood a fair stronghold, over which Hervör, the sister of Hlöd and Angantýr, had command, together with Ormar her foster-father; they were set there to defend the land against the army of the Huns, and they had a strong garrison" (Tolkien 1960: 52). After the defeat in the battle with the Huns – "Day and night Ormar rode, as fast as he could, to reach King Angantýr in *Árheimar*; [...] When Ormar came before Angantýr the king, he said:

From the south have I come
To speak these tidings:
Fire in the marches
Of Mirkwood is raging,
With the gore of men

All Gothland's [*Goðbjóðar*] sprinkled!" (Tolkien 1960: 53, verses there are very damaged: cf., Tolkien 1960: XXII).

When asked about the location of the final battle with the Huns:

"The king answered:

On the Danube-heath

Below the Hills of Ash

Shall you call them to fight,

Their foes meeting;

There often Goths

Have given battle,

Renown gaining

In noble victories" (Tolkien 1960: 55, again these verses are corrupt). The battle ended with a great victory for the Goths and the death of Hlöd.

In my opinion both *Myrkviðr* and *Árheimar* as well the battle somewhere in the Danube roughly correspond to the topography of the areas between Crimea and the Dnipro and Buh and beyond the Dnister and Danube. Probably the Battle of Nedao, took place near the Danube after Attila's death, which put an end to the rule of the Huns. However, with all these reservations, it would be a sin not to consider the new information provided by our excavations in Olbia, which shows that in the 5th century it was a significant centre of Gothic settlement, probably exceeding in importance most of the surrounding settlements of the Cherniakhiv culture. In these circumstances, the former Olbia is a new and extremely strong candidate for *Árheimar á Danparstæðum*, a settlement on the Dnipro.

If we accept the working thesis that the evidence discussed above is very suggestive that a new capital of the Goths was established in the place of Olbia, we should also consider what role it could have played in the history of the region and in the history of the Goths.

OLBIA UNDER GOTHIC RULE

The above mentioned struggles between Goths and Romans were full of dramatic twists marked by defeats for one side or the other. The first turning point is undoubtedly the Battle of Abritos. From our point of view, the most important and irreversible consequence of this defeat was the abandonment of Olbia by the Roman garrison. Archaeological sources reveal the first traces of settlements related to the Goths (Cherniakhiv culture) appeared in this region in the 70s of the 3rd century (Krapivina 2013). There are many indications that the character of the settlement



Fig. 4. An attempt at hypothetical topographic identification of lands and cities mentioned in Germanic sagas. Author: A. Twardecki (after ©Google Maps).

was changing equally and irreversibly, and the buildings of the new occupants ignored the earlier heritage of Greco-Roman architecture. It can be safely assumed that the life of the classical city of Olbia known to Herodotus or Dion Chrysostom ended and the history of an important, but now Gothic settlement began. Perhaps even the name of the settlement changed to *Árheimar á Danparstæðum*, a River Home at the Dniipro.

Furthermore, perhaps *Árheimar á Danparstæðum* is equal to Oium. The Greek meaning of the name is very similar to the terms used by the Goths to describe it. Crucial for this is a fragment of the text of Jordanes (2020: 27) – “While seeking out suitable land and the most suitable places for habitation, they came to the land of the Scythians, which in their language is called Oium. Enchanted by the great fertility of the region, half of the army had already gone across when, so it is said, the bridge by which it had crossed the river collapsed beyond repair. No longer could anyone cross over or return”.⁶

The sound of the Gothic name Oium (Aujumn) does not exclude the derivation of its origin from some late antique form to describe Olbia and adjacent territories (e.g.,

⁶ In Latin: *Qui aptissimas sedes locaque quum quæreret congrua, pervenit ad Scythia terras, quæ lingua eorum Oium vocabantur, ubi delectatus magna ubertate regionum. Et exercitus medietate transposita, pons dicitur, unde amnem trajecerat, irreparabiliter corruisse, nec ulterius jam cuiquam licuit ire aut redire.*

coming from Olvium) which could remain the old name of the mythical *Árheimar*. Perhaps it is a coincidence, but the oldest traces of the presence of representatives of the Cherniakhiv culture in Olbia appear shortly after the Battle of Naissus (268 or 269). It is now generally accepted that the areas between the Danube and the Dniro were ruled by the Thevringid dynasty, and those east of the Dniro up to the Don were the domain of the Greuthungid dynasty. Some scholars are of the opinion that Hermanaric managed, over the course of his long life, to extend his power primarily over the areas inhabited by Thevringi and Greuthingi. That is, his state included areas from the Baltic to the Black Sea and from the Danube to the Don and perhaps even extending to the Urals. And, perhaps again, Olbia/*Árheimar* was one of important centres of his “state” lying on the crossroads between the road along the waterways to the Baltic Sea and the land route connecting Greuthungi and Thevringi territories. Even after the Hunnic invasion, *Árheimar* preserved its importance as a capital centre of the pagan Goths engaged in confrontation with Christianized, pro Roman Goths moving west of the Danube. This situation ended at the beginning of the 5th century. The pagan Goths did not survive the disaster of the invasion of Radagaisus and very soon Attila, the new ruler of the Huns, moved the centre of his power more to the west, near the Danube. At this point, Olbia and the surrounding settlements were finally deserted, although there may still have been a harbour to cater for water trade and a nearby crossing over the Buh River (Fig. 4).

This version of the last, “Hunnic” period of Olbia’s existence obviously requires critical verification and further research to confirm, reject or modify it.

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