

# TWO LARGE SILVER HOARDS FROM OCKSARVE ON GOTLAND. EVIDENCE FOR VIKING PERIOD TRADE AND WARFARE IN THE BALTIC REGION

JAN PEDER LAMM

## Abstract

Three of the most remarkable Viking Period silver hoards found on Gotland form the topic of this paper. They all offer viewpoints upon trade, tribute and warfare in Gotland and the East Baltic area. The oldest of them (*t.p.q.* 870/1) was found in 1999 at Spillings in Othem parish. It illustrates the enormous influx of Arabic silver in its epoch, weighing more than 66kg, of which 17.5kg are made up of about 14,000 coins. Both of the other hoards were found at Ocksarve in Hemse parish, the first in 1920, the second in 1997. The hoard of 1920 *i.a* contains 112 Byzantine millaresia struck for Constantine IX Monomachos (1042–1055), probably part of the salary of a Gotlandic mercenary and ex-member of the Varangian guard. The second hoard (*t.p.q.* 999) is interesting from a metrological point of view, as it contains several interlinked payment spirals and bundles containing hack-silver. There is also a magnificent silver sword chape, probably a masterpiece from a Kievan workshop, with a graffito showing two crossed single-edged swords of J. Petersen's type T, V or W.

Key words: sword chape, silver hoard, Ocksarve, Spillings, coins, metrology.

## Introduction

My participation in this conference in memory of Vytautas Kazakevičius was caused less by its martial topic than by my great admiration for and friendship with Vytautas. I feel it is a privilege and a duty to start my lecture with a rather detailed eulogy in honour of his memory. I was happy to be given the opportunity to express how appreciated he was in Sweden as a pioneer of postwar archaeological cooperation between Lithuania and Sweden. He was an extremely good ambassador for Lithuania, not only in our country but wherever he went, with his charming, witty and good-humoured personality.

One of my contacts with Vytautas on his favourite topic, swords, took place in 1997. At the time, I was writing inventory notes for the catalogue of the Museum of National Antiquities in Stockholm concerning a large Viking Period silver hoard, weighing a bit more than five kilograms (5005.9g), found in May that year at Ocksarve in Hemse parish on southern Gotland (Fig. 1). The hoard had been dispersed by a plough over an area of more than 120 square metres, but had originally probably been hidden in the post-hole of a building. The hoard was excavated by Majvor Östergren (1997) using a metal detector, and its many coins were soon classified by Kenneth Jonsson (2002). The intention was that Östergren, Jonsson and myself should also speedily have published the hoard, a plan that unfortunately has not yet been realized. In 1998, however, a conference was held in Tübingen on mining, the precious metal trade and minting. At

that conference, Jonsson and I gave the hoard a first presentation. My detailed catalogue has recently been published as an appendix to the final volume of Lena Thunmark-Nylén's magnum opus *Die Wikingerzeit Gotlands* (Thunmark-Nylén 2006, p.707ff.).

## The contents of Ocksarve hoard and its relationship with the East Baltic

Only two years after the discovery of the Ocksarve hoard, an enormous but in many ways similar one, weighing more than 66 kilograms, was found at Spillings in Othem parish near the bay of Boge on northern Gotland (Westholm 2005; Thunmark-Nylén 2006, p.701ff.). It is 13 times as heavy as the Ocksarve hoard, and the largest one ever found in Sweden. Both hoards are mixed ones, with coins as well as jewellery.

The Ocksarve hoard of 1997 has a *t.p.q.* of 999 AD and contains 370 silver coins: 340 German, eight Bohemian, six English, six Ancient Roman, three Italian, three Arabic, two Scandinavian and one Byzantine. The find from Spillings is a triplet hoard, 130 years older than that from Ocksarve. It contains about 14,000 coins, most of them Arabic. Together they weigh 17.5 kilograms. Up to the autumn of 2006, 5,200 coins have been classified by numismatists. Their *t.p.q.* is 870/1 AD.

The hoards from Spillings and Ocksarve both contain great quantities of non-monetary silver artefacts of eastern and western origin, beside such of Gotlandic character. Both hoards include large numbers of spi-



Fig. 1. The Oksarve hoard of 1997 (in the custody of the Statens Historiska Museum 33128), now exhibited in Gotlands fornsal, Visby (photograph by R. Hejdström, after Thunmark-Nylén 2006).



Fig. 2. The heaviest silver bundle from Oksarve when opened (photograph by G. Hildebrand, Statens Historiska Museum).



ral rings, and artefacts have been bundled into heavier units. In the Ocksarve case most of the artefacts have been treated this way. There are six examples of payment spirals that have been hooked together into chains with up to four links. Four of these chains weigh around 200 grams each. The fifth weighs 155 grams, and the sixth about twice as much, 301 grams. There are also four bundles enclosing hack-silver type artefacts, such as rods, arm rings, spiral rings and ringed pins that have been cut up, pressed together and tightly trussed with a twisted neck ring to prevent them from falling apart. These bundles weigh 435, 452, 499 and 779 grams respectively. Much care seems to have been taken to attain these weights: even coins have been inserted, probably to reach the precise intended weights. A detailed study of the weights of these chains and bundles should be a promising task for a metrologist interested in currency basics in Viking Period trade between Gotland and the realms east of the Baltic. The bundles are unique, so it was decided to keep them intact. The truss around the heaviest of them, however, had slackened so much that it had to be opened (Fig. 2). Inside, a horn of an East Baltic silver dress pin, among other things, was hidden (Fig. 3).

The most remarkable single object in the treasure, however, is a tall, 16-centimetre-long silver chape to a sword, weighing no less than 90 grams (Fig. 4). It is bent and broken in three pieces, but all of them are preserved. No comparable item has been found in Sweden before but similar ones have been found in Latvia, Lithuania, Russia and Ukraine. The chape is long and closed with an animal-head as a crest, both at the rim and on its end that is formed like a chape on the chape. It is an odd and beautiful object that gets still more interesting as it is provided with a graffito in the form of two crossed single-edged swords without cross-guards. The pommels, however, attribute them as Viking Period swords of Petersen's type T, V or W.

Having catalogued the Ocksarve hoard, I began to search for parallels with the sword chape, consulting many colleagues, including Vytautas. His idea was that the chape might be Central European, perhaps Hungarian. In a paper given by him in Stockholm in 1992 based on Peter Paulsen's 1953 typology, Vytautas had assigned several chapes found in Lithuania to Paulsen's group III, among them a silver chape that in length and weight comes close to the Ocksarve chape. It was found in the Graužiai hoard in the Kėdainiai district. That hoard is thought to have been buried in the 12th or 13th century (Kazakevičius 1992, p.99).

In a letter written in May 1998, Anatolii Kirpichnikov kindly commented on the Ocksarve chape. It reminded him of chapes found in Russia and the Baltic countries.



Fig. 3. One of the terminals of an East Baltic silver dress pin with a triangular-shaped head (scale 2:1; photograph by G. Hildebrand, Statens Historiska Museum).

It was probably made in the tenth century, and might be considered as a hybrid, combining traits from the west, north and east. According to Kirpichnikov, the large animal head that adorns the chape makes it likely that it was made by a Scandinavian master craftsman. He suggests that the animal is a bear, which seems likely, considering the shape of its head with rounded ears. The small animal face, however, in my opinion looks rather like a horse. The bear face has parallels on certain Scandinavian jewellery like brooches and penannular brooches. Such have been found in the Yaroslavl district (Yaroslavskoe 1963, Fig. 39:2). Kirpichnikov also had ideas about the crossed swords. He describes them as of Petersen's type V and resting on a figure with two prongs. This sign, he believes, is related to Grand Duke Rurik and also Sviatoslav, who reigned 965–972 AD (Melnikova 1966, p.173ff.).

Kirpichnikov hypothetically understood the graffito as the owner's private mark, perhaps a sketch of a heraldic device. He adds that warriors sometimes had two swords, whereof one would be an heirloom. As an image closely reminiscent of the graffito swords, Kirpichnikov refers to a sword depicted on a Byzantine coin from the period 945–959 AD. The coin belongs to a hoard buried at the end of the tenth century (Dobrovolski *et al.* 1991, Figs. 15:i, 16:1).

If the crossed swords should be an owner's private mark, the significance of the animal heads remains to be explained. Maybe the ornaments have a shamanistic meaning. This has been proposed by István Dienes concerning a similar head on a strap-end found in a male grave at Bodrogszerdahely in Hungary (Fig. 5). The animal on that object looks like a fox, a cunning animal suitable as a guardian spirit.

Already in 1998, Voldomir Zotchenko, a student at the University of Kiev, had received news about the Ocksarve chape, and he discussed it in a 1999 paper. Zotchenko includes it in a group that he calls "tall chapes" and says that they originated on Oriental sabre sheaths

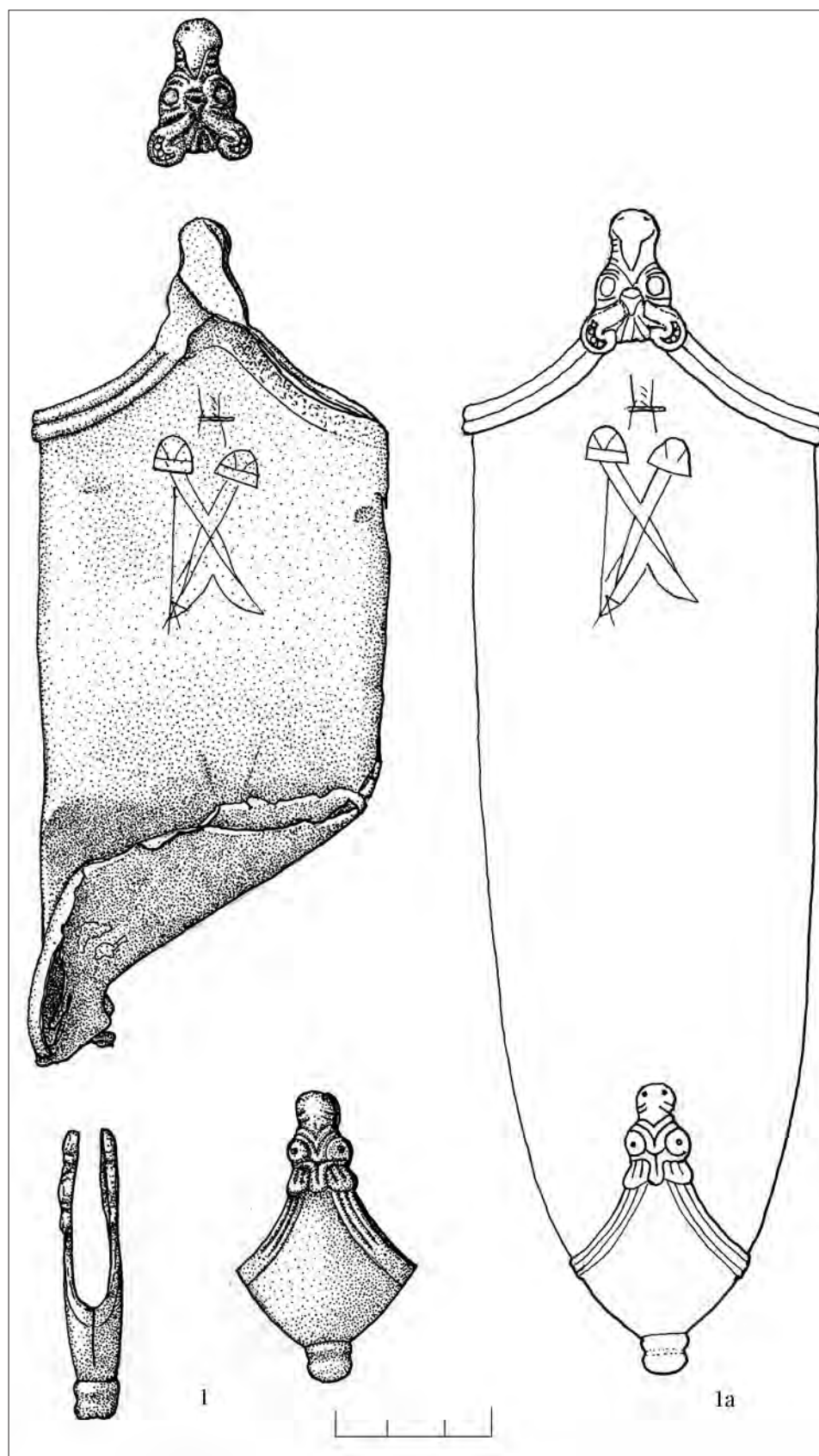


Fig. 4. The silver sword chape from Ocksarve: 1 the chape and its details; 1a reconstruction (drawing by C. Bonnevier, Statens Historiska Museum).

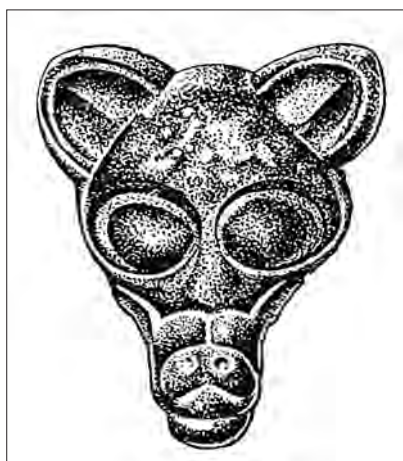


Fig. 5. An animal-head strap-end from a male burial at Bodrogszerdahely, Hungary (after Dienes 1972).

made in Kiev, Livland, Samogitia and the Sambian peninsula in the 11th century. This would mean that the chape from Ocksarve was no antique when it was destroyed and included in the hoard around 1000 AD.

The twisted neck-ring around the bundle, and the horn from a dress pin, point to the Baltic area, probably Lithuania, as the territory where the Ocksarve hoard was collected. The sword chape symbolizes power and authority. The sword from which it was removed must have belonged to an important person, perhaps a defeated enemy, whose belongings were apparently treated with disdain. Or had the chape simply gone out of fashion?

The *t.p.q.* for Spillings and Ocksarve differ by about 130 years, but their contents show how consistent the composition of Gotlandic hoards was, generally with a significant component of objects with an Eastern and often Baltic origin. For a combination of reasons, including warfare, tribute-taking and trade, enormous quantities of silver reached Gotland. Some proportion of the total imports remained on Gotland for good, and annually reminds us of its existence in the form of new hoard finds.

This paper has dealt with a hoard found in 1997, here simply called the Ocksarve hoard. The well-informed reader may feel confused by this, as Ocksarve is often also given as the origin of quite another hoard found in 1920 on a neighbouring farm (Jansson 1983, p.226; 2002, p.526f.). That hoard contains 631 silver coins. It appears to have been assembled over the course of about five generations. Its *t.p.q.* is 1120 AD. The most remarkable part of it is 123 Byzantine millaresia, 112 of which were struck for Constantine IX Monomachos (1042–1055). This part of the hoard probably reveals a

military aspect. Altogether, only about 400 Byzantine silver coins have been found in Scandinavia, and no other hoard contains a number comparable to that of the 1920 Ocksarve hoard. With Ingmar Jansson and many other scholars (Jansson 1983, pp.226 and 202), I am inclined to believe that the Byzantine coins were part of the salary paid to a Gotlandic mercenary and former member of the Varangian guard in Constantinople.

Salary for military service: isn't that a good combination of trade and warfare?

Translated by the author, English revised by Martin Rundkvist.

## References

- DIENES, I., 1972. *Die Ungarn um die Zeit der Landnahme*. Budapest.
- DOBROVOLSKI, I.G., DUBOV, I.V. & KUZMENKO, Y.K., 1991. Graffiti na vostochnykh monetakh. In: *'Drevnaja Rus' i sopredelnye strany*. Leningrad.
- JANSSON, I., 1983. Gotland och omvärlden under vikingatiden – en översikt. In: *Gutar och vikingar*. Historia i fickformat. Stockholm.
- YAROSLAVSKOE ..., 1963. *Yaroslavskoe Povolzhje X-XI cent*. Moskva.
- JONSSON, K., 2002. Ocksarve. *Reallexikon der Germanischen Altertumskunde* 12.
- KAZAKEVIČIUS, V., 1992. Sword chapes from Lithuania. In: *Die Kontakte zwischen Ostbaltikum und Skandinavien im frühen Mittelalter*. *Studia Baltica Stockholmiensia* 9. Stockholm, 91-107.
- MELNIKOVA, E.A., 1966. Znaki Rjurikovickej na vostochnykh monetakh. *Istoria Rusi-Ukrainy (istoryko-arkeologichnyj zbirnyk)*. Kiev.
- ÖSTERGREN, M., 1997. Silverskatten från Ocksarve i Hemse socken. *Gotländskt arkiv*, 79. Visby.
- PAULSEN, P., 1953. *Schwertortbänder der Wikingerzeit. Ein Beitrag zur Frühgeschichte Osteuropas*. Stuttgart.
- PETERSEN, J., 1919. *De norske vikingesverd*. Kristiania.
- THUNMARK-NYLÉN, L., 2006. *Die Wikingerzeit Gotlands III:2 Text*. KVHAA. Stockholm.
- WESTHOLM, G. (ed.), 2005. *Skatten från Spillings*. Visby.
- ZOTCHENKO, V.N., 1999. The high tips of sword sheaths of the late 10th – early 11th century AD. *Rannesrednevkove drevnosti Severnoj Rusi i ejo sosedej*. St Petersburg.

Received: 4 December 2006; Revised: 22 May 2007

# DU DIDELI SIDABRO LOBIAI IŠ GOTLANDO, OCKSARVE VIETOVĖS. VIKINGŲ LAIKOTARPIO PREKYBOS IR KARO ŽYGIŲ BALTIJOS JŪROS REGIONE ĮRODYMAI

**Jan Peder Lamm**

## Santrauka

Vienas iš vikingų laikotarpio sidabro lobų, sveriančių daugiau nei 5 kg, 1997 m. buvo rastas Gotlando saloje, Hemse parapijoje, Ocksarve vietovėje (1 pav.). Lobis tikriausiai buvo paslėptas buvusioje stulpo duobėje 999 metais. Tarp rastų 370 monetų 340 buvo vokiškos, 8 – Bohemijos, 6 – Anglijos, 6 – vėlyvosios romėniškos, 3 – arabiškos, 2 – skandinaviškos ir 1 – bizantiška.

Dauguma šio loby dirbinių buvo surišta ryšulėliais (1 pav.). Keturi ryšulėliai svėrė maždaug po 200 gramų, penktas – 155 gramus, o šeštas – beveik dvigubai daugiau, t. y. 301 gramą. Lobyje taip pat buvo keturi ryšulėliai, kuriuose rasta kapoto sidabro lazdelių, apyrankių, iš vielos vytų įvijų gabalų ir smeigtukų dalių, – šie dirbiniai buvo suspausti ir susukti bei suveržti įviniėmis antkaklėmis. Šie ryšulėliai svėrė 435, 452, 499 ir 779 gramus. Juose buvo įdėtos net kelios monetos, kad ryšulėlis pasiektų norimą svorį.

Šie sidabrinių dirbinių ryšulėliai buvo surišti kiekvienas savitai, taigi visi yra unikalūs. Nutarta juos saugoti tokiu pavidalu, koku jie buvo rasti. Tačiau sunkiausias ryšulėlis pradėjo irti, todėl nuspręsta jį išvynioti (2 pav.). Viduje tarp kapoto sidabro lazdelių ir kitų dirbinių fragmentų buvo rastas Rytų Pabaltijui būdingo sidabrinio smeigtuko trikampe galvute fragmentas: trikampės galvutės su buožele dalis (2; 3 pav.).

Lobyje tarp ryšulėlių buvo rastas išskirtinis dirbiny – tai 16 cm ir apie 90 gramų svorio kalavijo makščių apkalas (4 pav.). Apkalas yra lūžęs į tris dalis (4: 1 pav.). Tai vienintelis rastas toks kalavijo makščių apkalas Švedijoje. Panašių apkalų yra žinoma iš Latvijos, Lietuvos ir Ukrainos. Ant šio apkalo įrėžti du vienašmeniai sukryžiuoti kalavijai be apatinių rankenos skersinių. Įrėžtus kalavijus galima priskirti J. Peterse-  
no klasifikacijos T, V arba W tipo kalavijams.

1920 m. Ocksarve taip pat buvo rastas lobis, kuriame buvo 631 sidabrinė moneta. Šių monetų lobis, surinktas penkių žmonių kartų, buvo paslėptas apie 1120 metus. Pagal vertę išsiskiria 123 Bizantijos miliarisijai, kaldinti Konstantino IX (1042–1055) valdymo metu.

Šios monetos, matyt, pateko čia per karines peripetijas. Skandinavijoje iš viso rasta tik apie 400 Bizantijos monetų. Manoma, kad bizantiškos monetos atsirado Gotlande kaip algos, mokėtos gotlandiečiams samdinams (tarnavusiems Konstantinopolyje variagams), dalis.

Straipsnyje Ocksarve lobis yra lyginamas su 1999 m. Gotlande, Othem parapijoje, Spillings vietovėje rastu sidabro lobiu – didžiausiu iki šiol Švedijoje. Spillings lobis datuojamas 870–871 metais, jo svoris yra ne mažesnis kaip 66 kg, iš jo 17,5 kg sveria sidabro monetos, kurių daugiausia, t. y. apie 14 000, yra arabų dirhamai.

## VII

VIKINGS:  
WARFARE  
AND TRADE  
FROM THE  
BALTIC TO  
THE DANUBE

Copyright of Archaeologia Baltica is the property of Archaeologia Baltica and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.