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THE PROTOHISTORIC VENETI-VENEDI AND THE ORIGINS OF AMBER

In 1925 de Nevarro published a pionier study which attempted to define the prehistoric European trade routes over which amber moved. These ambertrade routes troughout the Bronze and Iron Ages of Europe led from the Baltic to the head of the Adriatic Sea (de Nevarro, 1925: 481—501; Lamberg-Karlovsky, 1964: 11—38). Recently archaeologists have contributed more detailed information on the amber trade leading from the Baltic to the Mediterranean and beyond (Simon, 1954; Hahmann, 1957; Spekke, 1957; Sandars, 1959: 292—5; Lamberg-Karlovsky, 1963: 301—02). At the same time, classical geographes have identified groups called the Venedi about the Baltic and the Veneti about he Adriatic Sea¹. So far no one has mentioned a possible relationship between the Venedi of the north and the Veneti of the south and their role in prehistoric amber trade. This paper will identify the two separate Venedi-Veneti groups and examine their relationship to each other and to the amber routes. We turn to the classical texts for a description of their culture and geography.

Herodotus was the first to bring attention to the Veneti (Rawlison, 1893: 182). He wrote that they inhabited the nothern shores of the Adriatic Sea. The Sigynae, living north of the Danube, were reported as bordering the lands of the Veneti². His report, by limiting the

¹ Rhys (1908) located Veneti at 54° N22oe Map 1 and the Venedi at 45°40' N12ow Map 7. Caesar mentions a third group called Veneti. These are described as an American tribe of maritime trader. In recounting his naval victory over them, Caesar noted their trade with Britain (Bunbury, 1958: 115—17). There are no other references to this tribe in classical texts. Ehys (1908) locates them at 47° 45' N3ow, Map 4.

² Archaeologists cannot isolate a material culture attributable to the Veneti, Venedi, or the Sigynae. The ethnographic method of historical reconstruction, useful in some cases (Lamberg-Karlovsky, 1962: 168—91 is not here. Recently, Alexander (1964) has suggested, on the basis of a series of pins from about the head of the Adriatic and in Slovenia, the existance of a Venetic tradition datable to the

Veneti to the Adriatic shores, while admitting to their neighboring the Sigynae, shows him to be indistinct on Danubian-Adriatic geography. There is a 250 mile distance between the Danube and the Adriatic Sea. The Sigynae and Veneti could border in only two ways: (1) either the Veneti extended their lands from the shores of the Adriatic north beyond the Danube or (2) the Sigynae extended theirs south almost to the Adriatic. It is most improbable that the Sigynae, mentioned only by Herodotus and Apollonius Rhodius, occupied this expanse without other classical geographer mentioning them (Bunbury, 1883: vol. 1, 167)²:

Chart I

Origins of amber and the Veneti—Venedi *

Author	Veneti	Venedi	Date	Origins
Herodotus	about the Adriatic Sea	no mention	ca. 484—322 B. C.	Northern Europe
Aristotle	about the Adriatic Sea	no mention	384—322 B. C.	On the Amber Islands about the Po(Eridanus) River
Pytheas	no mention	no mention	?-320-?	Northern Europe
Diodorus	about the Adriatic Sea	no mention	71—21 B. C.	On the Basilia Islands about the Po River
Pliny	Eneti about the Adriatic Sea	about the Adriatic Sea	A. D. 61-113	Northern Europe
Tacitus	no mention	Northern Europe	A. D. 55-120	Northern Europe

* Polybius and Ptolemy offer no information on the origins of amber, although the latter identifies the Venedi in Northern Europe. Strabo follows Aristotle and Diodorus in identifying the „Amber Islands” at delta of the Po River. He rejects, however, their existence, believing them to have been invented as an analogy to the Tin Islands (Jones, 1936, VI, 3. 1).

8th—6th centuries B. C. Forbes (1964:276) attributes to the Veneti the formation of the iron technology of the Halstatt culture. Most recently J a ż d z e w s k i (1965: 142—45, 160—61) has attempted to isolate and discuss the Venedian culture. In the discussion of this culture, he suggests that the Venedi of the north migrated to the south, settling south of the Danube. His suggestions tend to independently corroborate the thesis proposed here. It has been suggested that the Sigynae are in fact Scythians of the Hungarian group, represented by the Szentcs-Vekerzug cemetery (Sulimirski, 1961). Piggot (1965:182) has more recently suggested that the Sigynae are representatives of an earlier „Cimmerian” culture, later overlaid by Scythian traditions on the Hungarian plain.

² Strabo (xi, 11, para. 8) describes a people called Siginni but placed them in the vicinity of the Caspian Sea and the Caucasus.

In this text Germania, Tacitus places the Venedi in the northern lands adjacent to the Baltic Sea. The Venedi „borrowed largely from Sarmatian (lavs?) ways... nevertheless they are to be classified as Germans, for they have settled houses, shields, and are fond of traveling, and traveling fast on foot, in all these respects differing from Sarmatian ways, who live in wagons or on horseback" (Mattingly, 1948 : 140—1). The Venedi are further described as bordering the lands of the Aestii who collected amber from the „shallows, or even on the beaches". The amber „lay unheeded like any other jetsam until Roman esteem for it made its reputation. They (Aestii) have no use for it themselves. They gather it crude, pass it on unworked and are astounded at the price it fetches" (Mattingly, (1948 : 140). It is not unlikely that the Aestii passed this unworked amber on to their neighbors, the Venedi, for further trade.

Greek and Roman writers heard vague reports of the countries about the Baltic and Northern Seas. East of the river Vistula, Ptolemy (iii, V, para. 1) names four rivers which flow into the Baltic Sea. A great bay east of the Vistula he named the Venedic Gulf. The people inhabiting its shores he called Venedi and described them as composing one of the great nations of Sarmatia. Ptolemy confirms Tacitus' geographical location of the Venedi but differed in identifying them as Sarmatian, not Germans. Tacitus' identification is likely to be the correct one; he reported the Venedi as Germans who „borrowed largely from Sarmatian ways". Ptolemy's geography, unlike Tacitus', was based on the accounts and reports of others and not on his own explorations and observations. The contradictory placement of the Venedi about the Adriatic Sea, according to Herodotus on the one hand, and in northern Europe, according to Tacitus and Ptolemy on the other, are resolved when the writings of Pliny and geographical origins of amber are considered.

According to Pliny, „Amber is imported by the Germans into Pannonia (northeastern Italy), more more particularly; from whence... a people in the vicinity of Pannonia, and dwelling on the shores of the Adriatic Sea, first brought it to general notice" (Jones, 1936: 403—4). Pliny confirms Tacitus' implication that amber trade was in the hands of the Venedi but counters his identification of the Venedi in northern Europe by referring only to the Venedi about the Adriatic. An identical confusion exists in the classical texts over the geographical provenience of amber. The source of amber is ascribed to either the shores of the Adriatic Sea, about the Po (Eridanus) River, or to northern Europe about the Baltic Sea, the indential geographical regions ascribed to Veneti and Venedi. A summary of the major clas-

sical texts describing the geographical provenience of amber and geographical location of the Veneti and Venedi is provided in Chart I.

It is interesting to note that classical geographers, excepting Herodotus and Pliny ascribed the provenience of amber to the geographical area in which they located either the Veneti or Venedi. It is important to note that natural deposits of amber do not occur about the head of the Adriatic. Amber found in this geographical region was found on analysis to have been imported from Baltic (Lamberger-Karlovsky, 1963:26-38). Reconsidering Pliny's text will resolve the confusion over amber's origin and the Venedi's geographical location (Jones, 1936:403-4).

„Amber imported by the Germans into Pannonia, more particularly: from whence the Venedi, called by the Greeks Eneti, a people in the vicinity of Pannonia, and dwelling on the shores of the Adriatic first brought it (amber) to general notice... 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 recently been ascertained.

Pannonia, located to the northeast of the Adriatic Sea, was at the southern terminus of the Iron Age transcontinental amber route (de Nevarro, 1925:490—50; Gimbutas, 1963:18—25). Archaeological finds verify Pannonia as an important trade center during Iron Age (Alexander, 1962, 1964; Snodgrass, 1962:408-11). Due to the geographical position of the Venedi, at the southern terminus of the amber route (Pannonia), it was natural for them to control the amber trade between northern Europe and the Mediterranean civilization. Aristotle (Ross, 1913) and Diodorus (Oldfather, 1937) never looked beyond Pannonia and the Po Valley for amber's origin. Pliny further states that the Venedi in Pannonia first brought amber to general notice, after acquiring it in trade from the Germans⁴ (Tacitus' Venedi).

It is quite likely that the Venedi of northern Europe mentioned by Tacitus, Pliny, and Ptolemy and the Veneti about the Adriatic mentioned by Herodotus, Aristotle, and Diodorus are one and the same

⁴ Tacitus' Germania attributed amber's popularity wholly to „Roman demand". However, in the Aegean, i. e. the Mycenaean, traded for and received amber from the Baltic a full thousand years before the writings of these classical texts. Merchants traded amber across central Europe to the Aegean before 1600 B. C. (Clark, 1952:258—64). After the middle of the second millennium the political climate of Crete and the Mycenaean mainland collapsed. When it did, the east Mediterranean market for Baltic amber collapsed and trade across the continent dwindled. The Greeks had little use for amber as a decorative gem. It was Roman trade which revitalized the interests and demand for amber. Tacitus, however, could not have known of the earlier „prehistoric" trade in amber. He was, however, correct about the importance of Roman trade during his time.

people in control of this overland trade in amber. Tacitus stated that amber was found on the shores of the lands inhabited by the Aestii, who, not realizing its value, traded it and were astounded at the price they received. It is more than likely that the Aestii traded amber with their neighbors, the Venedi, who carried it back to their homeland, Pannonia (which as Pliny correctly noted is about 600 miles from the Baltic); Pliny further makes the important observation that the Greeks called the Venedi Eneti. The Venedi of the north who were „fond of traveling and traveling fast” traded this amber from northern Europe to the head of the Adriatic from whence it was traded to the Mediterranean civilizations. It is manner the Venedi were credited by Pliny as being the first to bring amber to general notice, while Aristotle and Diodorus never looked beyond the southern terminus of the overland amber route, the head of the Adriatic, for the origins of this most prized prehistoric gem. It is possible that the Venedi of the north, mentioned by Tacitus and Ptolemy, were traveling merchants from Pannonia (where other authors identified them as Veneti or Eneti) establishing outposts along these routes to control trade in amber. With such an explanation the contradictory identifications of the Venedi-Veneti and the origins of amber are resolved.

The linguistic studies pertaining to the Venetic inscriptions, known from the 5th century B. C. on (no Venedic inscriptions are known, Lejeune, 1957), provide us with further information, a new approach, and a suggested corroboration of our view. In Jacobsen's view there is no certainly that the Venedi were Slavic speakers (quoted in Hencken, 1955 : 37). There has been no substantive linguistic argument viewing the Venedi of the north, first mentioned about a century after the Veneti about the Adriatic, as Slavs, Wends or Illyrians (Kretschmar, 1943 : 134—52). Indeed, it is significant that the Venedi of the north cease to have a separate cultural existence, while the Veneti about the Adriatic Sea continued to inhabit that area until historic times. The elimination of the Venedi from the cultural tradition of northern Europe occurs around 900 B. C. when the transcontinental trade in amber diminished. Hencken (1955 : 25) significantly suggest that the Veneti arrived in northeastern Italy during the 9th—8th century B. C., bringing an Italic language with them from the urnfield area (the area of the Venedi) of north-central Europe⁵. In settling permanently in this area, the prior control over the amber routes which the Venedi earlier exercised was relinquished and the

⁵ Hencken (1955 : 24) in accepting the Veneti as Italic speakers believes them to be related to the Villanovans whom he believes also to have been speakers of Italic.

trade in amber diminished. The absence of hoards, previously attested in Pannonia, and limited use of amber during this time (1000—800 B. C.) is archaeologically evident (Lamberg-Karlovsky, 1964:21—5). The previously held view that the Venedic peoples were Illyrians, Wends, or Slavs has been adequately dispelled by linguistic research. Their identity as Italic speakers has been widely accepted by linguists who have addressed themselves to problems of the Venetic language (Beeler, 1949, 1956; Whatmough, 1950; Hamp, 1954, 1959). The fact that Venetic has been shown to contain both Italic and German isoglosses is significant if the Venedi and Veneti are culturally the same and migrated from north-central Europe to the shores of the Adriatic (Beeler, 1956:38—48) in control of the amber trade.

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