

On the Weaponry of the Early Roman Period in Finland and neighbouring Areas

Roman Period weaponry can be mainly studied with the aid of graves containing weapons which began to make their appearance in the Finnish coastal area at the beginning of the Early Roman Period, viz. the latter part of the first century AD. At that stage burial with grave goods was a common practice in the lands around the Baltic, but burial with weapons was not as common; weapons are practically lacking in the graves of the oksywie culture on the lower Vistula (Jahn 1916, 10–12; »Oksywie-gruppe, »Filip 1969), and apparently because of its influence also from among the culture sphere of the tarand graves, ranging from the Gulf of Finland to the River Dvina (Moorra 1938, 508–510, 524); Eesti Esiajalugu 1982, 222). Nor are weapons to be found in all of Finland's burial grounds and in others they are underrepresented in comparison with other artefacts (Salo 1968). Also in Sweden, graves with weapons of the first century seem to be lacking for the most part, with the possible exception of Öland. However, during the latter part of the Early Roman Period weapons become common in the graves of the region (Salo 1968, 192–197).

Weapons make their appearance in the Estonian finds only in the latter part of the Late Roman Period, although this lack is to some extent made up by depot finds, especially the Alulinna sacrificial find (e.g. Schmiedehelm 1955, fig. 26; Eesti esiajalugu 1982, 221, 283–284). On the other hand in the Baltic area in Latvia, Lithuania and East Prussia weapons were placed in graves already in the Early Roman Period (Moorra 1938, 508–516; Lietuvos archaeologijos bruožai 1961, 177–191; Jahn 1916, 254–257). Although the Finnish material is not complete in all respects, the Roman Period weaponry of the country can still be quite well placed in the context of the other Baltic countries.

During the Early Roman Period in Finland there are two distinct and discrete groups of weapon combinations in graves (Salo 1968, 224–227). Both groups include a spearhead but only one contains a sword and/or metal parts of a shield; the latter may comprise in addition to the shield-boss, decorative fittings of the handle, and in some rare cases an edge-fitting. There are four known, and two uncertain, combinations of sword, spearhead and shield parts.¹

Furthermore, a grave from Käsämäki with a Roman dagger (pugio) instead of a sword can be compared with the above. The combination of sword and spearhead is known from 4 graves;² sword and shield parts from 3 graves³, and the combination of spearhead and shield parts from 6 or 7 graves.⁴ All in all, swords and/or shield parts have been found in c. 30 graves or finds.

Ten of these swords belong to the group of light one-bladed swords or »sceax-type» swords, with a three-riveted tang as a continuation of the back (Salo 1968, 121–122). The type can be traced back to still shorter sceax-swords or scramasax -types found in the Vistula-Oder area in the Early Pre-Roman Period. In these the tang is similarly asymmetrical (e.g. Kostrzewski 1955, fig. 490). The

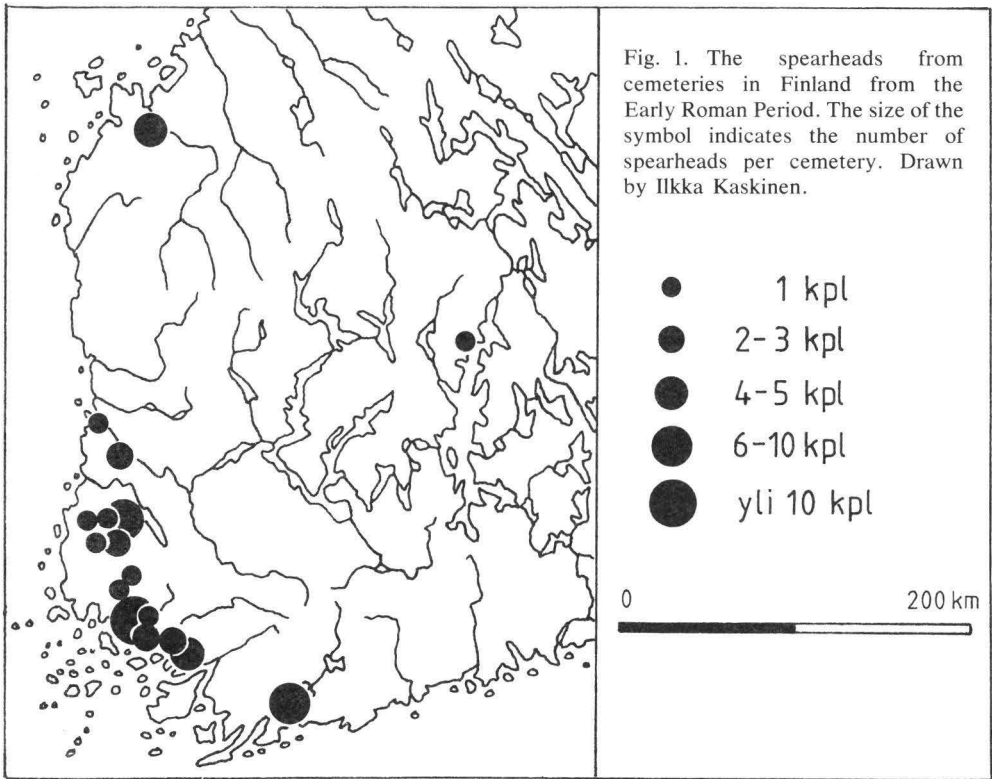


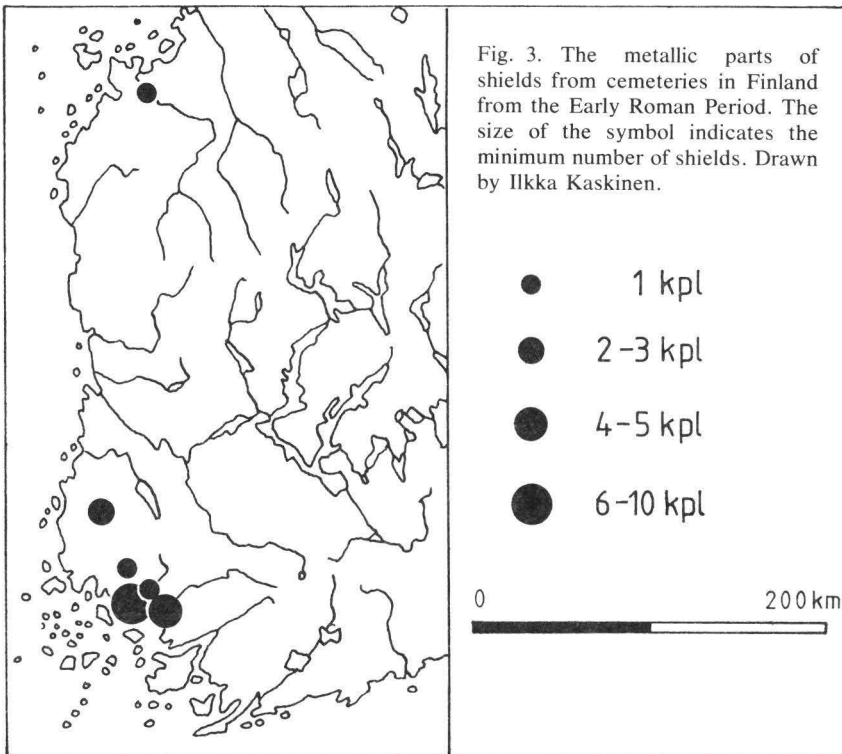
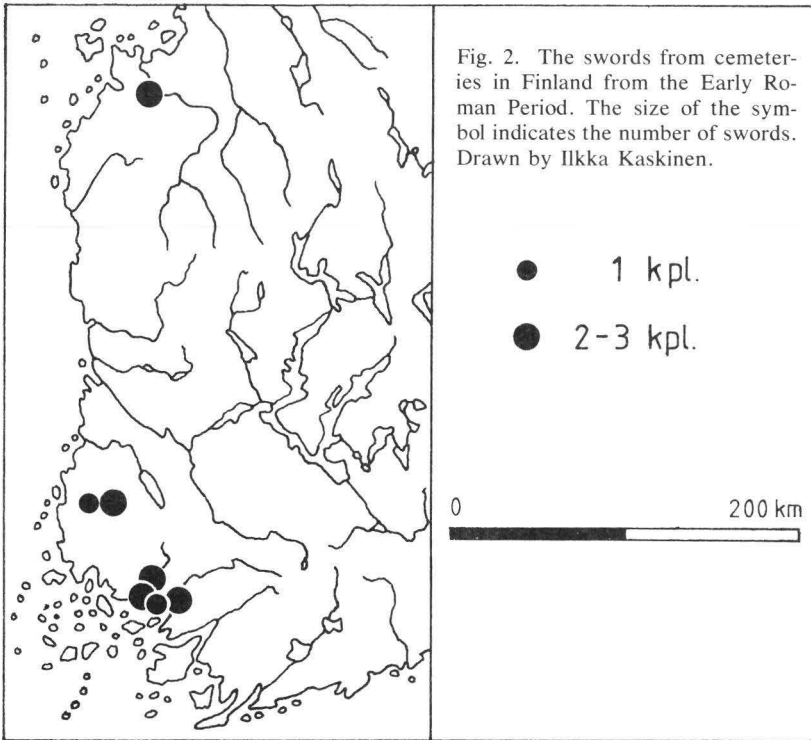
Fig. 1. The spearheads from cemeteries in Finland from the Early Roman Period. The size of the symbol indicates the number of spearheads per cemetery. Drawn by Ilkka Kaskinen.

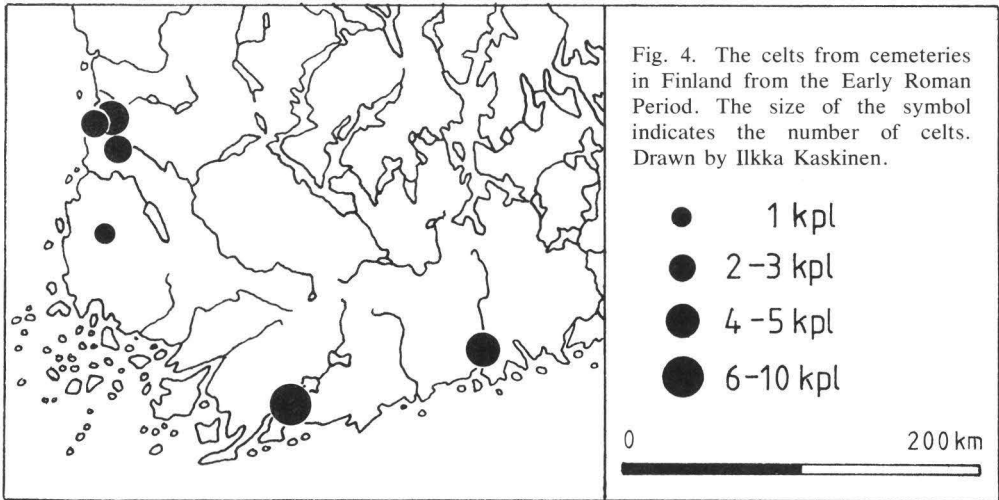
one-bladed swords from the Hjortspring find that are approximately of the same age differ from these because of their symmetrically placed tang.

It was from the light scea-x-type sword of the north-east contact zone of the Celtic area that the heavier and longer scea-x-type sword of the Preroman Period developed in the Vistula-Oder region spreading from the lower Vistula to the Elbe, the northern parts of Jutland and Eastern Sweden, at least partly in the form of imported material (Salo 1968, 122–123 and quoted literature). Import may also account for the Pre-Roman scea-x-type swords found at Lazdinni in Courland and Arkna in Virumaa, possibly also Kömsi in Läänemaa (Moora 1938, 524; Eesti esiajalugu 1982, 193).

From their original form the scea-x swords became lighter and shorter around the beginning of our era, apparently as a result of the new tactics employed by the Germans of the Elbe region against Roman attempts at expansion during the reign of Augustus (Jahn 1916, 145–148; Salo 1968, 123). The light scea-x-type sword came into use also in Scandinavia. The Finnish specimens, the oldest of which can be dated as early as the latter half of the first century AD, are from Finland-Proper, viz. the coastal area from Piikkiö to Laitila, as well as from Southern Ostrobothnia (Salo 1968, 121–122). They are not found in the coastal area of Satakunta or Uusimaa. The western distribution suggests that they came from the west from two innovation areas, but the swords are without details that could define their area of production and they could also have been made in Finland.

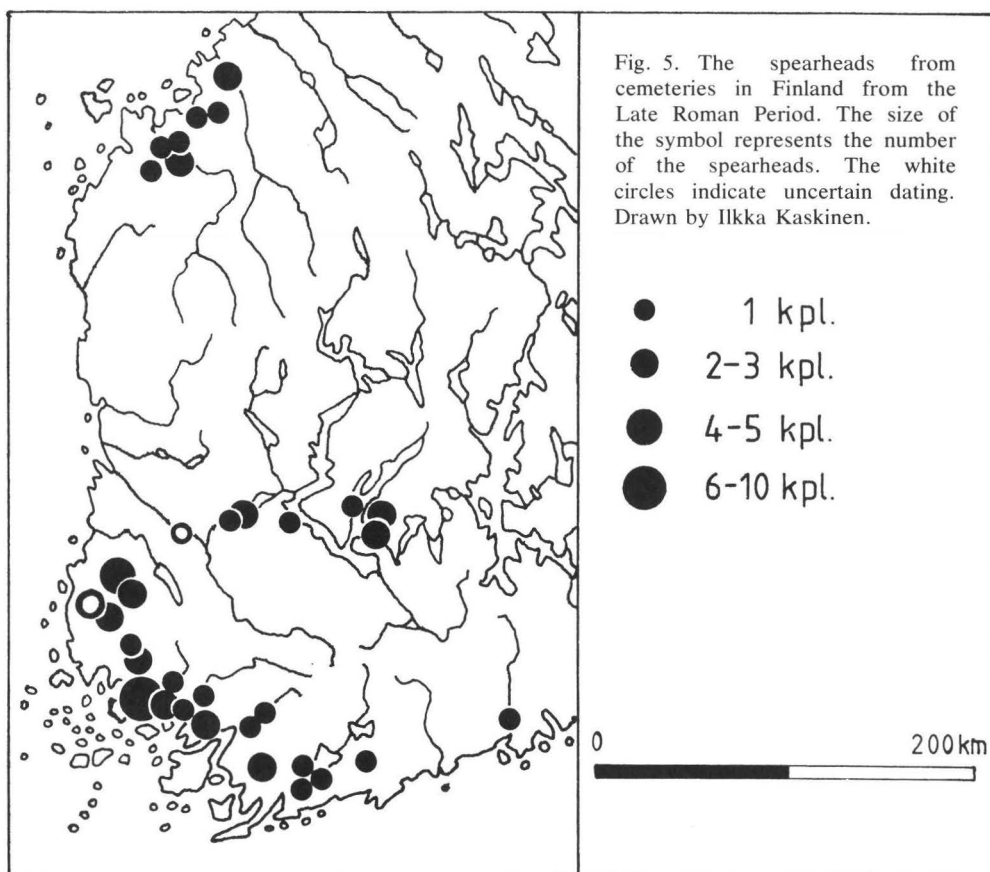
The remaining swords of the Early Roman Period in Finland (3 specimens) are light, long-tipped thrusting swords (Salo 1968, 124). They are of a type, that came





about in the Elbe region around the beginning of our era, based on the gladius of the Roman legionaries (Jahn 1916, 125–133). This also reflected the same renewal and lightening of arms that led to shorter and lighter scax. The Germanic gladii came into use in Denmark immediately at the beginning of our era, but judging from dated finds they spread to Sweden later, period B2, which is the certain or probable dating for the Finnish specimens (Salo 1968, 124–127). The Finnish gladii are all from the Turku area and they may have been imported from the Continent. The swords from Käsämäki and Saramäki with their oblique shoulder on the blade are probably from the Oksywie culture as this feature occurs in a couple of swords found in Poland and East Prussia; one of the specimens may have been made at a location further west. The gladii do not seem to have become especially common in the areas east of the Baltic in the Early Roman Period: I know of three specimens from East Prussia and one from Estonia (Salo 1968, 125, note 5; Lõugas 1978).

Early Roman Period shield-bosses are 16 in number in the Finnish finds, in addition to which there is a find with rivets and another with a handle fitting (Salo 1968, 142–153). The Central-European-Scandinavian forms are represented by three conical shield-bosses and eight of tapering or spiked form. The origin of the conical type cannot be ascertained but the tapering form includes some specimens with a low or oblique neck which may have parallels in finds from Öland, West-Götaland and Medelpad, as well as the simple handle fittings connected with these and sometimes also with the conical shield-bosses (Salo 1968, 145–150). These may thus have been made in Sweden. The spike-domed bronze shield-boss from Koskenhaka, on the other hand, is an imposing specimen, that is apparently from the Upper Elbe area. The Elbe area may also be the point of origin of the bronze shield rivets with thimble-like bases found in Saramäki (Salo 1968, plate 32, plate 27: 5, 7, 8). A more problematic group are five low nipple-domed shield-bosses, as they are closely related to the low-domed shield-bosses of the Pre-Roman Period but again differ from them because of their narrow edge and are without doubt from the Early Roman Period, probably its beginning as also certain other shield-bosses (Salo 1968, 143–145), the only parallel known to me is from Fyen. The rarity of the type may be explained by the fact at the beginning of the Early Roman Period in Scandinavia



weapons were rarely put in graves; the form must therefore be from there. There are no preliminary phases to this type from Finland, and neither does it seem to be from the Okseywie culture, in which case it could be assumed that the form would also occur in nearby East-Prussia, where burials with weapons are relatively common (Jahn 1916, 254–257).

The shield-bosses are from the same burial grounds and areas as the swords: the central and northern parts of Finland-Propria and Southern Ostrobothnia; they are not found on the Satakunta coast or in Uusimaa. Both forms and distribution suggest that the shield with metal parts was adopted from Sweden at the same time and in the same areas as the swords. The set of weapons, consisting of a sword, a spear and a shield with metal parts, corresponds to that found in Europe and Scandinavia, which thus was adopted in Finland in the Early Roman Period. This phenomenon was also connected with placing arms in graves, which in turn became a common trait among settlement using burial grounds from the Late Roman Period onwards. New weapons and the placing of them in graves may probably signify Germanic social ideology taking root in Finland, a process with its initial stage already in the Bronze Age.

A second and differing set of personal weaponry consists of a spear and socketed celt (Salo 1968, 224–225). It can of course be argued that the socketed celt was

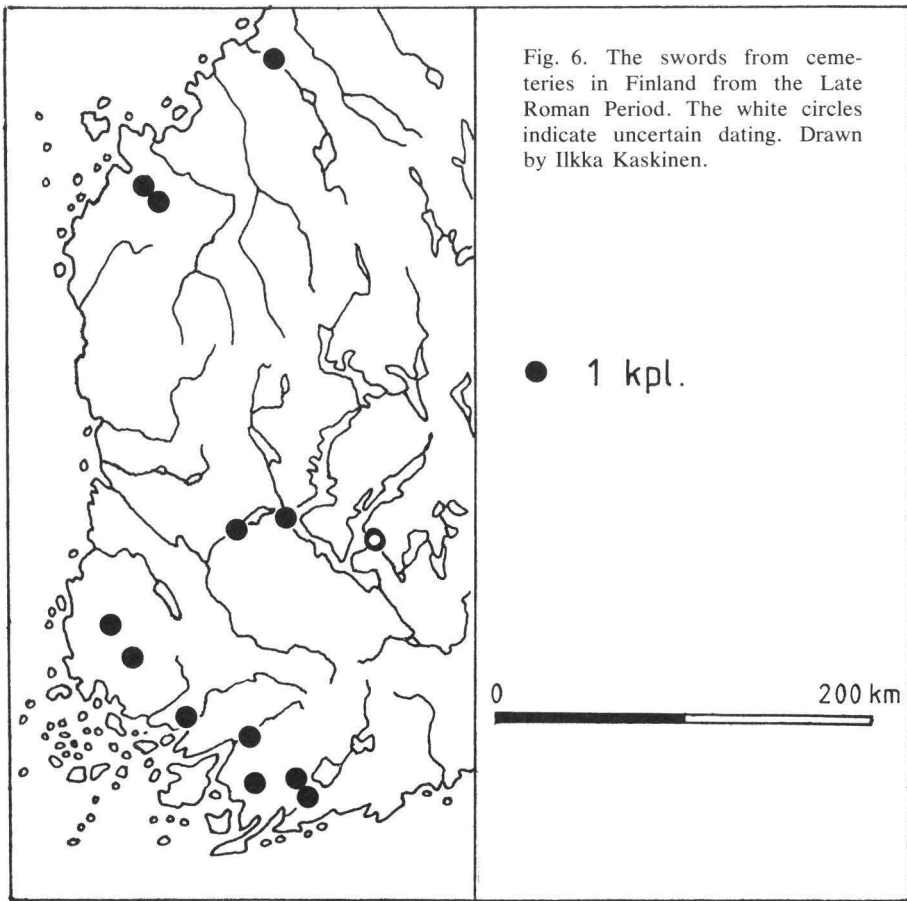
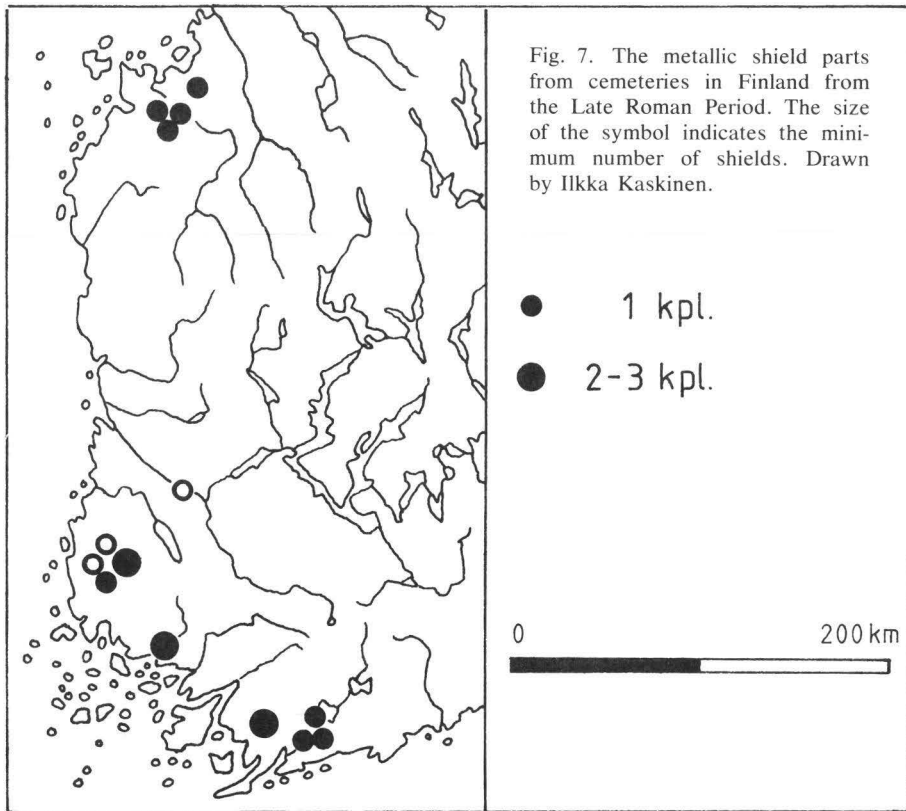


Fig. 6. The swords from cemeteries in Finland from the Late Roman Period. The white circles indicate uncertain dating. Drawn by Ilkka Kaskinen.

primarily a tool and not a weapon, but on the other hand it cannot be denied that it could have been used as a weapon if necessary. Furthermore many celts have such narrow blades that they seem to have been better suited to use as weapons than as working blades. Regardless of the interpretation, it can be noted that celts were not placed in any of the Early Roman Period graves, if the grave-goods included a sword and/or shield parts. Celts and the last-mentioned artefacts do not even occur in the same cemeteries; the combinations are thus discrete.

The combination of spearhead and celt is known from four graves of the Early Roman Period⁵ and a single celt, which can be interpreted as a poorer version of the same set of arms has been found in about fifteen cases.⁶ In the Penttala burial ground a celt was found exceptionally in combination with a round-backed dagger in a grave probably dating as early as the beginning of our era. Also two Early Roman Period spearheads were found at Penttala.

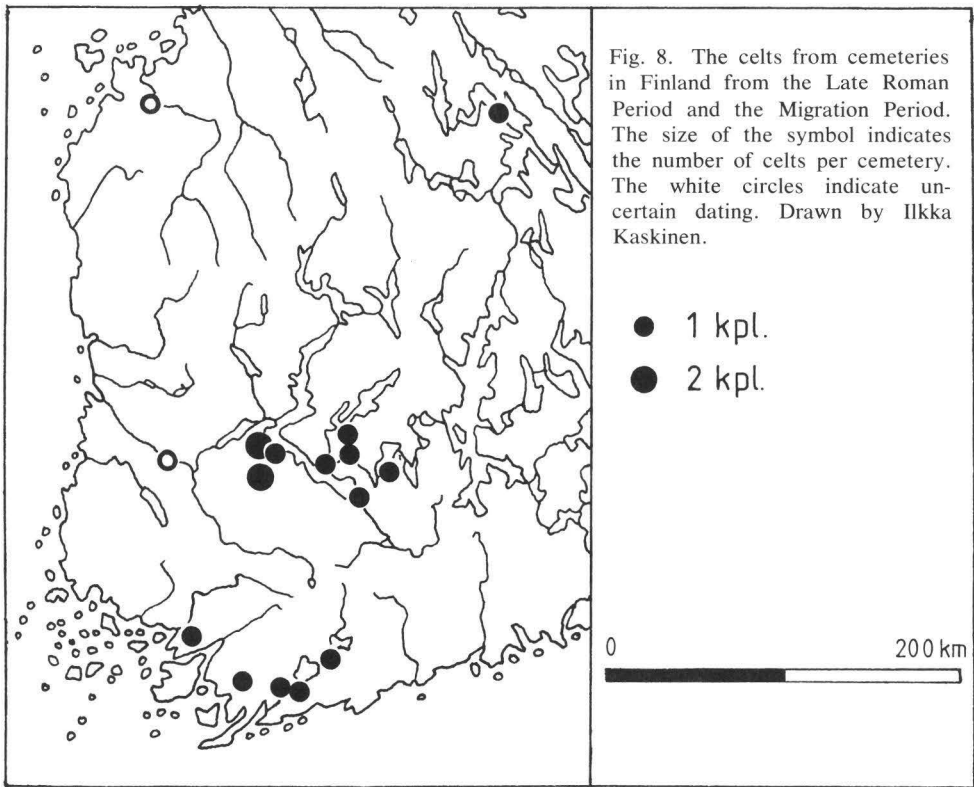
Around twenty celts are known from Early Roman cemeteries. The grave finds with the combination of spearhead and celt or the celt alone are limited to Uusimaa and the mouth of the Kokemäenjoki river, with only one exception. They are thus apart from Finland-Proper and Southern Ostrobothnia, and it can be seen that weaponry displays distinct spatial distributions. It can be surmised that the celt



represents an early style of weaponry and that it remained in use in areas, where Scandinavian contacts were not felt to any greater extent.

This assumption finds some degree of support in the subsequent history of these combinations. It can be observed that celts occur in Late Roman Period graves in the south-east regions of Finland-*Proper*, viz. from Karjaa and Lohja to Sauvo, an area where Central-European-Scandinavian weapons had not spread in the Early Roman period (Keskitalo 1979, 11–18). Celts have been found in graves of the end of the Late Roman Period or Migration Period along the Kokemäenjoki river water system, especially in Häme, an area that was practically peripheral to Scandinavian contacts (see preceding note).

It must however be added that the situation on the coast was not so clearly dichotomous in the Late Roman Period as earlier. The set of arms consisting of a sword and/or a shield with metal parts spread at that stage to the celt area, the south-east parts of Finland *Proper* and western Uusimaa. Swords have been found along the coast from Uskela to Karjaa (Keskitalo 1979, 17–42). At the end of the Late Roman Period swords appear in grave finds also along the Kokemäenjoki river, and probably also shields with metal parts. Because of poor preservation there is no equally unambiguous evidence for the latter (Kivikoski 1973, plate 148 and text; Luoto, Pärssinen & Seppä-Heikka 1983; Keskitalo 1979, 88, 98–100). As mentioned above, celts still occur in Late Roman Period and Migration Period finds at the south-eastern headwaters of the Kokemäenjoki water system.⁷ They are also



common in the Satakunta finds in the Merovingian Period. Crudely estimated, they are more common there than e.g. in Finland Proper (Salmo 1952, 478): Although placing celts in graves was a common practice in the Merovingian Period and does not signify a practice contrary to placing swords in graves, the large number of celts from the Satakunta and Häme graves may be partly explained by old and traditional weaponry.

The combination of spear and celt may be traced to a much earlier stage in Finland, although this is not reflected in the weapon combinations of the graves. These artefacts do however occur together in the Malmsby depot find from Pernaja and the Mäkkylä find from Helsinki, both dated to the end of the Pre-Roman Period (Salo 1968, 83).

The celts with attaching rings of these finds are continuation, as is well known, of Late Bronze age celt types and the history of metal spearheads also extends to the Bronze age, whereby the combination of spear and celt can possibly be characterized as Bronze Age – despite the occurrence of Bronze Age swords. It must also be mentioned that the weapons combination of spear-celt is common in the Ananino culture (V. S. Pankrušev, A. H. Halikov 1982). As there is a lack of combinations I shall not pursue this line further back into time and instead I shall concentrate on neighbouring areas.

In the Estonian and Latvian tarand-grave area the practice of burial with weapons was adopted only to a nominal degree, at the very end of the Pre-Roman Period as indicated by the above single-edged swords. The well-known Jäbara twin-edged

sword from Virumaa (Schmiedehelm 1955, 24–29) may also be located at this chronological stage, although as a weapon form it belongs to the anthropodic or pseudo-anthropodic short swords of the Early La Tène Period (Filip 1956, 531–532). The dating of this sword to the Early Pre-Roman Period, possible in itself, is in my view, highly improbable for the reason that at that stage weapons were not placed in graves anywhere else in the Baltic region. The celts with attaching rings found in the tarand cemeteries of Estonia are also features of the Late Pre-Roman Period and the early Roman period. They indicate that celts belonged to a man's accountment at the end of the Pre-Roman Period and the beginning of the Early Roman Period (Eesti esiajalugu 1982, 190–192, 232). The existence of Early Roman Period spearheads is in turn witnessed by the Alulinna find among others (Eesti esiajalugu, 221, 283–284). It is thus obvious that the Estonia and northern Latvia were part of the celt-spear area, even though certain Central European weapon forms may have found their way there. Metal parts of shields begin to appear in the Estonian finds only as late as the Late Roman Period (e.g. Schmiedehelm 1955, fig. 26).

The assumptions concerning Estonia and Northern Latvia find certain support in the fact that celts are common in Roman period graves south of the Dvina in Latvia as well as in Lithuania (Moor 1939, 498–507; Lietuvos archeologijos bruožai 1961, 177–178). They are also to be found in some extent in East Prussia, where, however, weapon combinations of Central European type spread already in the Late Pre-Roman period and especially in the Early Roman Period (Okulicz 1973, 359; Antoniewicz 1962, platers XXII–XXIII; Jahn 1916, 234–235, 254–257).

The Baltic peoples seem to have retained the same combination of weapons, possibly dating from the Bronze Age, that was discussed above with reference to the Finnish material. In Finland the Central European-Scandinavian and the Finnish-East Baltic combinations of weapons seem to indicate ethnic differences, but the same feature is also reflected to some extent further south. Tacitus, outlining the differences between various tribes with reference to weapons among other features, seems to give the same contradiction between Central European and East Baltic combinations of weapons. According to him short swords and round shields⁸ were characteristic of the Goths, Gotones, living along the Vistula, whereas the Aestii tribes further to the east, which must have meant the Balts, very rarely used the sword (ferrum), note that the term »ferrum» very often means sword in addition to iron. The Aestii, on the other hand, used a weapon known as »fustis».⁹ The word means »a striking weapon», »stick» or »club» and it has been often interpreted as some kind of weapon.¹⁰ With reference to the grave finds I suggest that the weapon in question was a celt. This was unknown to the Romans, who would use of it a term that would correspond closest, and at the same time it was a weapon showing the difference between the Baltic peoples and their western neighbours.

¹ Sonkkila, Laitila; Kärsämäki, Maaria (Turku); Saramäki 1 ?, Maaria (Turku); Koskenhaka 2 + 1 ?, Piikkiö.

² Savemäki 1, Laitila; Sonkkila 1; Kärsämäki 1; Saramäki 1.

³ Sonkkila 1; Koskenhaka 1; Pajuperkiönmäki 1, Vähäkyrö.

⁴ Sonkkila 1 + !?; Kärsämäki 5.

⁵ 3 graves in Kroggårdsmalmen, Karjaa and one grave in Parkkali, Pori.

⁶ 4 finds in Kroggårdsmalmen and three in Parkkali. Celts as grave-goods have also been found at

Pikkulinnanmäki, Porvoo (3 specimens – although some of them may be from the Late Roman Period), one from Haaro in Laitila, 3 from Rajakalmisto in Pori and 2 from Penttala in Nakkila.

⁷ Hackman 1905, 71–72, Niemumäki in Urjala; Salmo 1952, 467; Karholannokka in Vesilahti. Huurre 1972, 72, Rönni and Myttäälä in Pälkäne.

⁸ . . . » rotunda scuta, breues gladii» . . .

⁹ »Rarus ferri, Frequens fustium usus.»

¹⁰ E.g. in Linkomies' translation: »Iron is seldom used but clubs are in common use.» p. 70.

REFERENCES

- Antoniewicz 1962 = Jerzy Antoniewicz, *The Sudovians*. Białystok.
- Eesti esiajalugu 1982 = *Eesti esiajalugu*, L. Jaanits, S. Laul, V. Lõugas, E. Tõnisson. Tallinn.
- Filip 1956 = Jan Filip, *Keltové ve střední Europe*. Praha.
- Filip 1969 = *Enzyklopädisches Handbuch zur Ur- und Frühgeschichte Europas*, Jan Filip unter Mitwirkung zahlreicher Fachgelehrter und wissenschaftlicher Institutionen. Prag.
- Hackman 1905 = A. Hackman, *Die ältere Eisenzeit in Finnland*. Helsingfors.
- Jahn 1916 = Martin Jahn, *Die Bewaffnung der Germanen der älteren Eisenzeit*. *Mannus-Bibliothek Nr. 16*. Leipzig.
- Keskitalo 1979 = Oiva Keskitalo, Suomen nuoremman roomalaisen rautakauden löydöt. *Helsingin yliopiston arkeologian laitos. Moniste n:o 20*. Helsinki.
- Kostrzewski 1955 = J. Kostrzewski, Wielkopolska w pradziejach, *Biblioteka archeologiczna 7*. Warszawa-Wrocław.
- Lietuvos archeologijos bruožai 1961 = P. Kulikauskas, R. Kulikauskiene, A. Tautavičius, *Lietuvos archeologijos bruožai*. Vilnius.
- Luoto, Pärssinen & Seppä-Heikka 1983 = Jukka Luoto, Martti Pärssinen ja Merja Seppä-Heikka, Grain impressions in ceramics from Ristimäki, Vammala, Finland. *Finskt Museum 1981*. Helsingfors.
- Lõugas 1978 = Vello Lõugas, Kust tuli Alutaguse. *Horisont 3*.
- Moor 1938 = H. Moor, *Die Eisenzeit in Lettland bis etwa 500 n. Chr.* II Teil: Analyse. Tartu.
- Okulicz 1973 = Jerzy Okulicz, *Pradzieje Ziemi pruskiej od późnego paleolitu do VII w. n.e.* Wrocław.
- Patrušev, Halikov 1982 = V. S. Patrušev, A. H. Halikov, *Volžskie Ananjiinsi*. Moskva.
- Salmo 1952 = Helmer Salmo, Rautakausi. *Satakunnan historia II*. Vammala.
- Salo 1968 = Unto Salo, Die Frühromische Zeit in Finnland. *SMYA 67*. Vammala.
- Schmiedehelm 1955 = M. H. Schmiedehelm, *Arheologičeskie pamjatniki perioda razdoženija rodovogo stroja na severo-vostoke Estonii*. Tallinn.
- Tacitus 1952 = Tacitus, *Germania*, Suomentanut ja lyhyesti selittänyt Edwin Linkomies. Helsinki.