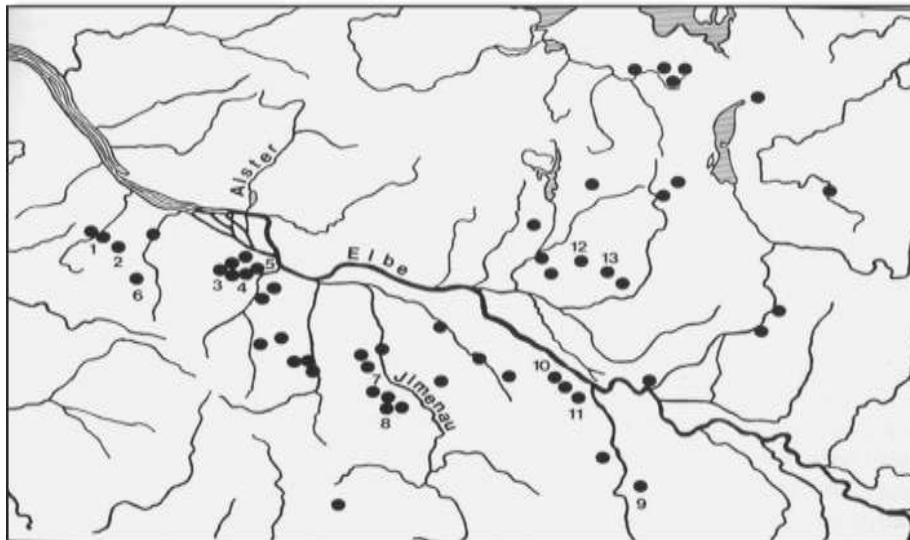


SHEETS

Proto-history - The Lower Elbe



In the first century AD the Longobards could be found in the territories of present-day Mecklenburg-Vorpommern and, above all, along the final stretch of the river Elbe, where their new warlike approach very probably developed and where their actual entry into History is ascertained.

The Lething Dynasty

The rare written sources - from the *Origo* onward - mention the first king, Agilmund (son of Agio). And, after him, the equally mythical Laamicho (*Laamisio*), whom Agilmund found in a marsh where he had been abandoned by his mother, perhaps a goddess (a recurrent motif in Indo-European mythology). The next king was Lethuc, from whom descended the noblest Longobard dynasty, the Lethings, whose blood - with that of the Bavarians - would be found again, 600 years later, in Queen Theodelinda and her successors during the foundation of the Longobard Kingdom of Italy and in the approach to Roman Catholicism.

It was in the area between the Lower Elbe and Mecklenburg that the Longobards - like all the Germanic races of the Suebi - fully acquired the typical characteristics of western Germanic peasant civilization: social and political organization, religion, language, stock rearing, farming, pottery and metalworking techniques. In short: here the Longobards became fully aware of themselves.

Features of the period

In the five centuries spent along the Lower Elbe (first century BC - fourth century AD) the uses and customs of the Longobards were similar to those of the Suebi (or Suevi).

The Longobard villages, built on the vast plain raised above the marshy banks of the Elbe, were scattered over vast landscapes of heath. There we can still find the ancient sacred spaces with their megalithic tombs, to which other tombs were then added, almost as though a timeless ritual function were assigned to the broad clearings in the woods, suspended between magic and meditation.

The main economic activities were, for men, hunting, fishing, farming - limited to harvesting, to subsistence crops (wheat, barley, oats, rye, millet, apple trees) - and rearing small livestock.



Handicrafts concentrated on the production of pottery for family use, the construction of weapons and of simple farming tools. The production of ornamental objects - especially for women - grew gradually and the technique was perfected with more and more refined procedures.

The dead - as is demonstrated by archaeological excavations at Darzau, Rebenstorf, Rieste, Nienbüttel, Bahrendorf, Harsefeld, Putensen, Hamburg-Langenbeck, Hamburg-Harmstorf - were subjected to incineration, with burials in necropoles of urns. In the most ancient period, lances and other weapons were buried with the men.

Later an aristocratic class appears to have formed, shown by two rich burials in tombs (at Marwendel) and two with cinerary urns (at Apensen and Putensen).

War

But the prevalent activity of the Longobards became war, especially to defend their food deposits or to conquer new living space. Greek and Roman written sources (Strabo, Tacitus, Ptolemy, Cassius Dio, Marcus Velleius Paterculus) offer brief, though not quite historically reliable, records of the participation of the Longobards in wars.

5 AD - Defeated by Tiberius, the Longobards fled to the right bank of the Elbe and joined a Suebian confederation that thwarted the attempt of Augustus and Tiberius to found a Germanic province along the Elbe (*Albis flumen*).

Alliance with Maroboduus, king of the Marcomanni, and with other populations.

9 AD - According to one historic hypothesis, the Longobards were present at the Battle of Teutoburg Forest where the Germanic alliance, under the leader of the Cherusci, Arminius, destroyed three Roman legions of the consul Publius Quinctilius Varus.

17 AD - With the Cherusci led by Arminius, they fought victoriously against Maroboduus.

47 AD - The Longobards restored Italicus, king of the Cherusci, to the throne, after he had been cast out by his people.

166-167 - A contingent of 6000 Longobards and Obii fought alongside the Marcomanni in the wars (which they lost) against the Roman legions of Marcus Aurelius.

Fourth century - The long journey of the Longobards across Europe began, accompanied by the occupation of territories (liberated by the Rugii) and by victorious skirmishes (against the Herules).