

## Heruli the history 268 - 568 AD

*The heydays of Heruli lasted 300 years when they were hired as mercenaries in the Roman Empire and settled as a tribe. Thanks to their pay in gold that we can tell about Scandinavian history in restless time of battling Attila and establishing the Catholic Church*

Heruli, Eruli, Mercurius Rex, Svebian league, Svebian knot, Sverus, Ammianus Marcellinus, Erilar, palace guard, Batavi, Notitia dignitatum, Illerup bog, red shield, Roman Eagle, Attila, Odoacar, Theorderic I, Emperor Leo, Dane, Anastacius, Duke Fara, Arian Wulfila's Bible, Silver Bible, Philimuth, Narses, Langobards, Justinian, Battle of Taginae

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### Scandinavian background



*Four of a kind was found in a bog Maglemose Zealand together with a pair of other bracts. Compare this to the solidus of Emperor Leo below and we see the shield with the horse and the spear "of Constantinople" and even the ribbon is Roman. But note the Celtic neckring with knobs!*

OA : SEJSRUL : AUALHR

In this essay we shall see in short at the history of the **Heruli / Eruli**. Then it is about the military tribe and not much about their source and relatives in Scandinavia called Erils or as they wrote "Ek ErilaR = I th we Eril. That is to make the distinction between mainly legionaries in Rome and Erils making a normal life in North.

Some use the terms east/ south/ west Heruli but that is just confusing and was not used in those days. In the list were they are mentioned there is only one people "Heruli gens". However the term Eril covers several tribes in Scandinavia and there were several groups of Heruli. The Frieslandn belonged surely to the Erils and they were known as Heruli from the Ocean but sometimes named Frieslandns. The Rugi came from Pomerania and settled in Bavaria and are normally called Rugi but they belonged to the Heruli/ Erils.

Some Heruli wanted to be in the shadow of the Visigoths = Polish Goths in 435 AD. And lastly we have Heruli that originally were in Moesia/ Romania but moved to Moravia and were forced to Hungary and Yugoslavia/ Balkan by the Langobards. They had a king and were placed between Quadi and Marcomanni in the list. There is no need to make attributes whence we follow the timeline.

This can not be history in the traditional way because the time span is long and we have not facts enough. But since we have written sources in Rome we can drop down at few times and connect it to other facts such as rune inscriptions, neckrings, golden bracts, halls and artefacts. We can also give some background and tell what we know. Better than nothing.

I am not going to tell what I see as "rumours" by the Roman authors. I am not interested in telling what I see as political pamphlets often writing down the "germans = brothers". It is time that someone sees history from the viewpoint of northerners. I am sure that all people were as decent as the time was. The Romans were not good as idols, but as some Eril said "Howl with the Lupus, that will pay"

The Heruli is not mentioned before 267 - 268 AD. Before that they were known at Rhine as traders and soon in brotherhood with the Batavi. See the [Hoby family](#) for a possible "treaty of commerce" around 14 AD. Later in the same century Roman perhaps Emperor Nero set up stelae for **Mercurius Rex** and local deities from the North.

Before that Scandinavians were mainly known as the feared Cimbri that fought Rome around 107 - 103 BC. The Romans learnt to fear Scandinavia and its people. I am not so sure that they generally saw any difference between Heruli, Cimbri, Rugi, Friesians and other tribes or "Vikings". However they employed an auxiliary legion foot soldiers and a cavalry cohort from these tribes later.

Tacitus wrote about Germanicus loosing a fleet in the North Sea much in the same way as the Phoenicians wrote about [Hyperboreans](#) = northmost northerners. They wanted to protect the trade with amber and other stuff. Another thing is that "Could we be sure that northerners told as it is in Thule?". Think if the Romans got the idea of conquering

Scandinavia? I doubt the Scandinavian were so honest and truthful those days ... and as we are!

Germania was then all land above Rhine and eastward to Russia of today. A few tribes were on the border and sometimes inside the Roman Empire. The **Swebian league** consisted of 54 tribes Orosius tells and that were the major part of the people of Germania. Scandinavian Erils belonged to the league as we see on the golden bracts. They were idolising long Celtic hair as symbol and sometimes we see the "**Swebian knot**" in the hair on the bracts.

Anyhow the situation at the German border at Limes = Rhine was always like cat and dog. Especially the Alemani did not like to become under Roman rule and the last conquered bit of land was in Bayern 85 AD. Even the Marcomanni in Bohemia were continuous threat to the Romans. In Dacia/ Romania was the last successful war in 117 AD and after that there was border problem always that is why they build 30 castles at Lower Danube. Maybe some of the Heruli fought there sometimes on both sides.

Tacitus ca 100 AD wrote that the Batavi lived on an island in the mouth of Rhine and by treatment they furnished the Roman army with soldiers and became free of taxation. In time they spread upwards the Rhine to Bavaria = Austria. Ptolemy has Lugdunum Batavorum at the mouth of Rhine and upstream was Batavodurum. For the traders Legio XXX Ulpia Agrippinensis at Mainz would buy almost everything from the North. At the same time the Romans became acquainted with the Heruli that probably founded enclaves for their trade with the Romans on the other side of Rhine.

They have found graves there and for instance a woman warrior from the North. In first century the Romans set up stelae in the Celtic provinces and some was dedicated to northern Mercurius Rex, Mercurius Leudisio and Mercurius Hanno. The later I would connect to Fyn in Denmark since early Danish sources places Hanno at that island. We have many finds of gold from that island.

But even the people of that time had their prehistory. We can call the traders Erils from Scandinavia with root in the bronze trade starting 4000 years ago. The Erils were forced to trade with the south and got friends along the route to Thuringia and Austria as for instance the Warners at Oder that was named Suevus by Ptolemy, i.e. Swebian River and the Baltic Sea was Suevi. Since we have no sources telling about the first two centuries we can guess that it was "business as usual". That means border struggle here and there and trades at Rhine and even the East trade through Russia to the Asowska Sea.



*A sample from Flackarp Skaane showing the neckring of the Golden Ring League*

The pattern at the ring is the same as on rings from Wermland, West Gautland, Saudermanland, Skaane, Halland, Gotland, Auland, Funen, Zealand, Pommern and from Norway. See [Neckrings and halls](#). Many of them have even the shape in common so we can speak of having the same tailor. The conclusion is naturally that it must have been a league with a common decision at some event. Naturally there are also a few different rings but that belongs to the picture. Some tribes maybe did not want to be in the league.

The last emperors of the god-begotten sort was the **Severus** dynasty 195 - 235 AD. Severus Alexander and Julia Mamaea where assassinated at Rhine 235 AD. It was an important event that made people think that even Sun Emperors could die. After that followed military dictators until 284 AD and even after that emperors were elected by the army and taken from some province.

On the golden bracts the myth about the sun king still lives for a couple of centuries, but maybe they saw the sun as rational as we do ... simply the warmth needed for growth. They just needed some symbol for it but they knew about the important flow we all are depending on. The sun king's bust covers easily the fact that time and calendar is the main issue on the golden bract. But our wish and our imagination want to see a great chieftain alternatively a god that fixes everything.

Already in the time of Severus the inflation was high and in 237 AD they stopped coining the silver denar that was carrying the Scandinavian trade for instance. Severus was forced to double the pay to the legions and that weakened the rule. The empire was from time to time very weak depending on the skill of the military emperor at rule.

The neighbours saw an opportunity as well at Rhine as in east from Moldavia where the Goths originally from Poland and the latecomers the Heruli and other tribes filled in. There were the attack in 267 - 268 AD through the Bosporus to the Aegean seas. Some source mentions 320000 in the crew on 2000 ships which would be 150 on each ship --- I believe more in the figure 500 ships and 20000 in the crew.

They plundered in Greece and on the Anatolian coast as for instance the temples at Ephesos. The wars ended according to the legend in enrolling the Heruli under their leader Naulobatus to the Roman Army in east.... See also the finds in [Pietroasele](#) where the Heruli maybe were at duty on the castle until 365 AD.

Emperor Claudius got credit by the name Gothicus and normally they mention only him. But the wars continued with for the instance the Heruli conquering Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia and Cilicia. Emperor Tacitus and his half brother Florianus overcome the threat 275 AD and Tacitus got Gothicus Maximus to his name. However Emperor Probus 276 - 282 AD got the lasting peace and also the title Gothicus in 277 AD.

After that he turned to the German frontier and got the victory. He enrolled 16000 Germans and sent them to Balkan. To the fortifications we can suppose and there were 31 of them at left side of the lower Danube. They were a kind of hostesses that pacified both Germans and the Goths and others on Balkan.

We can assume that in his time Probus established the Heruli as people within the empire in Moesia. And also that the first mercenaries were hired to a castle at [Pietrosole](#) see the neckring file. Another thing is the influence we see in the golden bract and especially some early medals copying the [The Flying Horse](#) from the Probus coins. After his time the coining got a new model we see normally a bust with ribbon in the hair. On Funen we see the cultural import in women jewellery of Moldavian and Moesian style.

Later **Mamertinus** tells about the Heruli that crossing the Rhine and attacking the Gauls in France in 287 AD. That shows the times that peace was very relative and we know that the Peace Gate in Rome was never shut. We can deduce that Heruli must have lived on the other side of Rhine as an enclave that bartered with the Romans. Of the [rune finds](#) in Germany are 42 % from Baden-Württemberg and 80 % of them are on woman gifts. They also found one silver neckring Celtic Style/ Nordic in Aalen Ostalbkreis.



## The Auxiliary Legions

Here I mention Probus because his coins seem to be inspiration to the "sun-rider bract". From Brangstrup Fyn we have the find of 49 golden coins from every Roman emperor 270 - 361 AD. In the finds there was 13 aureus/ solidus from Constantine (he began the solidus minting in 310 AD). Normally the aureus and later solidus was used as pay to legionaries. So we can guess that Heruli from the western frontier or at Rhine were enrolled even before Constantine I 306 - 337. He seems to have given a medal to commander from the neighbourhood of Oslo Norway.

**Ammianus Marcellinus** 330 - 395 AD is the best source for the real heydays of Heruli in 4<sup>th</sup> century. We have much evidence in the medals and bracts that completed the notes from him. In his time they wrote **Eruli** and at tombstones in for instance Puteoli ERULLIA PRIMULA MATER INFEL(IX) and Vitulanum AERULLIAE IUSTAE CONIUGI PETRONIUS PRIMIGENI ANUS. Nowadays **Heruli** is used "world wide". In Scandinavia they wrote at the time **Erilar** and **Irilar**. In my writing I use **Eril** and that was meaning the four classes in the league, while the Heruli in Rome were soldiers.

In the time before the writing of Ammianus we have the golden medals of the Constantinians and even golden bracts with the text "Our lord Constans" and even Constantius II. He mentions the Heruli together with the Batavi as brother people and Rome often used the legions in pair. Under Julian 361 - 363 AD they were promised to not be on duty "transrhenanis", which means on the Eastern duty in the Levant. They were perhaps from the beginning in Casta Batavis on the Austrian border.

In 364 AD emperor Iovianus promoted the Herulian Vitalianus to magister for a **cohort** (ca 500) in the **palace guard** and was later promoted to **comes** (commander). Later in 6<sup>th</sup> century they tell about the Herulian Cavalry with 300 - 500 men so maybe this unit was established all the time. It was much like a rule that whence established the bureaucracy kept such thing alive forever. From the time of Valentinian I and his brother Valens we have finds of golden medals from Faxe Zealand, Aarhus Jutland and Lista Westagder Norway... [Gold medal](#) and [A-bract](#)

The legions were foot soldiers and the Heruli and **Batavi** were sent to Gaul as auxiliary legions with the Jovii and Victores legions. Later they were sent to London and with Theodosius the Elder 368 AD they were sent to the Hadrianus Wall against the Picts from Scotland. In Notitia Dignitatum ca 400 AD we learn that the Batavi cohort was stationed at BROCOLITIA = Carrawburgh, Northumberland. There was also the Frieslandn cohort at VINDOBALA = Rudchester Northumberland. Since Frieslandns are not mentioned in other connections we can assume that they were the Herulians and in later connection they are called Heruli at the Ocean.

We have other examples how names could alter with time and writers. The Parthians furnished three legions and coins were minted telling about the Parthians. However the Parthian kingdom was overruled in middle of 3<sup>rd</sup> century. That is why I think they were later sometimes called the Saracens from the same area of northern Iran to Syria. We know the Saracens several hundred year later.

Auxiliaries were mercenaries from outside the empire such as from German tribes, Scandinavian Cimbri, Erils/ Heruli, Parthians and more. They signed for 20 - 25 years and became Roman citizen with right to own property and settle down in the empire when they retired. With no profession a piece of land was necessary all over the world to get a living.

There was another term for those hired as "laeti" which means soldiers that got a piece of land outside the town with military duty besides. Ordinary folks/ people could become

"foedorati" and I think there is another term "sciri" meaning "settlement under agreement". My conclusion is that the Heruli fled from Moesia to Moravia Bohemia after the fall of Pietrosole in 365 AD according archaeology. Iulius Honorios place the Heruli gens (people) between the Quadi and Marcomani. Some writers wants to call them south or east -Heruli but I think it is only confusing and the Romans did not see it so.

Next evidence about the Heruli and Cimbri we get about the situation around 400 AD. We can note from the Roman document "**Notitia dignitatum omnium tam civilium quam militarium in partibus occidentis**" that is the **Register of Dignitaries c. 400 AD**. In that we also find paintings of the helmets with crest that could be very long at parades.

From the register we learn that Batavian and Herulian veterans/ seniores were in Legiones Palatinae "**V. Insignia viri illustris magistri peditum**", that is subordinated the high commander of infantry. The term "palatinae" should be the best soldiers. We learn that the Batavi had a cohort At the Hadrianus but also in the eastern part of the empire. The legions were often split to several places

In "**VII. Qui numeri ex praedictis per infrascriptas provincias habeantur**" ... we learn that one legion was placed in Italy and then Concordia = agreement/ unity. The Herulian legion used two concentric circles as symbol in the shield and maybe that meant brotherhood. I have looked for it at the bracts with no luck. But these were foot soldiers and not the world of the cavalry we see on the golden bracts.

After the Diocletian revision around 300 AD the ordinary legion was 1000 soldier and 50 in cavalry. Then there were the borderers in cohorts of 500 men auxiliary or ordinary suitable for the normal castle on the border as we see on the Hadrian wall with 23 castles. normal for a castle. Besides that were the moveable legions "troops on the line" 1000 men and cavalry in three cohorts. The trusted "schools" and palace guards were in cohorts.

A branch of The Batavians gave name to the Imperial Guard however to that they recruited generally also the best from other units. The Herulians were at least for a time trusted palace guard. We can read a lot about the Herulian Cavalry in first part of 6<sup>th</sup> century. The register was valid only at the particular time but we get the idea of the organisation. We have finds of coins, medallions and golden bracts from the time of Valentinian III 425 - 457 AD too besides the time of the Constatinians..

Most interesting is that we in the register find also two **Cimbriani Legions** of which one belonged to the same Legiones palatinae. The other was stationed in **Intra Africam cum uiro spectabili comite Africae**. The Romans named the Cimbri people of Jutland Denmark since the big Cimbri and Teutoni Movement in 109 - 103 BC that threatened Rome. However they did not know too much about the people north of Rhine. So it could also mean the Angli while the Friesians were seen as Heruli. We have golden bracts from Northwest Germany or Friesland too.

Friesian traders bartered along the coast to Esbjerg earlier than Roman times and maybe they founded Ribe later. The earliest hall we know of is from Feddersen Wierde in Old Friesland build around 100 AD or it was really a town with 35 halls and 12 other houses. Maybe a trading place? The golden horns from Gallehus speak for some kind of brotherhood between the Hard-Jutes in north and the Angli. In these lands there are no finds of ritual neckrings and that separates the culture a little from the Danish Isles, West Gautland and South Sweden. Maybe their gold was used in the horns.

See the [Gallehus Horns](#) with foot soldiers. On one of the horns there is a pair of soldier in almost the same fashion as some statue from Portugal. They have round shields and the short sword called "semi-spatha" in Rome. The Romans got that from the Gauls at the same time as they adapted the helmet. The Romans were best with short sword man against man they tell, but they developed the body-covering shield. Later they got the long sword and they rather hired riders until the cavalry was reorganised in beginning of 4<sup>th</sup> century



*Noble Eril/ Heruli with his noble horse*

<http://www.illerup.com/default.htm>

The **Illerup bog** near Skanderborg or Aarhus is the most important source when it comes to military equipment from the period 200 - 500. We have all the right to believe that we there find the normal equipment for the noble Eril/ Heruli as well as for the "Spear-Dane" or foot soldier. We see he has a Roman sword and on some baldric there has been the Roman Eagle. However he should maybe have long hair as we see on the golden bracts ... see also [Finds](#)

On the site there are more than 100 photos from the digging and reconstructions from the bog. They have in 50 years found around 15000 items from ca 200, 225, 375 and 450 AD.



The biggest find that cover the entire valley is from 200 AD. They think a Norse fleet with 1000 soldiers from Viken - Bohus attacked this neighbourhood. We can guess that the Eiril League was created after the big battle since we find similar [neckrings](#) in the entire Scandinavia and the golden bracts also covers the lands

There are finds of **red shields** and we know from the Irish legends that the Finnlochlanaig from Viken used red as the totem colour. On Zealand they were white and in Skaane black. Around 450 AD we know about warlike remains from entire South Scandinavia, Auland and Gotland and South Denmark.



*Decoration for the baldric*

This find we can connect to the Heruli as evidence for the Nordic origin together with other facts. This was hardly normal ware in trade but made for the noble men in the legions. The amazing thing is that there was a small fault in the mould and there is a find of an exact copy from Carlisle near the Hadrianus Wall. As told we know that emperor Valentinian sent the Batavians and the Heruli to the wall around 368 AD.

There are parallel finds from the Tunis and we can compare that with the Cimbri Legion in Africa. There are parallels to Rhineland too. Emperor Constantine early 4<sup>th</sup> century had his court in Trier and we have the [Undeley Bract](#) showing his style. I suppose he was the first to recruit real cavalry from the Heruli. The northern trade went surely to the garrisons in Rhineland too.

The **Roman Eagle** is known as the ultimate symbol of the Roman Legions. Whenever we see enthroning Jupiter/ IOVI or his stand-in the Emperor they have the Sun-Eagle at foot as icon for the "all-seeing eye". Here the text reads OPTIME MAXIME CON and it means that Jupiter protects the warrior. See also the Undley Bract and the text on the neckring from Pietroasa Romania reads "Sanctified by IOVI".

We should also mention the many finds of miniature masks we can connect to the Mithras cult among the nobility in the Roman Army. The mask was maybe icon for "The Face of Underworld". The Mithras' temples were normally underground and maybe because

Mithras (The Sun) was born out of the mountain. There figurines and images showing him being inside. Boys always love secrecy and mystery.

In Beowulf from 8<sup>th</sup> century we read about the "Spear-Danes" and maybe they meant the Jute or Getae as often mentioned in the poems. In the Roman Army the legions were often specialised. On the later helmets from **Vendel and Sutton Hoo** we see foot-soldiers in pair with spears or in "swine phalanx" with spear and the double snake on the helmet. Pair in symbolism means brotherhood and they practised it in many connections such as the brotherhood of Batavians and Heruli/ Erils Normally we cannot generalise from one document but are forced to when that is the only we have.

In end of 5<sup>th</sup> century the finds of solidi are often uncirculated and minted in East Rome of which some are from Antioch. Normally the local commander paid the soldiers and minted the coins so it is very possible that some Nordic legion was there. Even solidi minted by Emperor Leo are frequent this time.

Here I leave out the help to the Celtic brothers in England starting 449 AD with Horsa and Hengest ... see the [Anglo Saxons](#). Modern archaeology have found that the "invasion" began much earlier and maybe 428 AD when Vortigern came to Power. Some scientists think they came from Friesland but even in there we find the Erils so they belonged to the league of traders. However the analysis of M Mackeprang shows that the golden bracts found in England are of the West Scandinavian style and especially from Jutland. Majorities of the finds are of the Snake Pit style that has its mainland at Jutland. But as mentioned we see also that the style and connections among traders extended from Ribe South Jutland to Elbe and Rhineland.

M Mackeprang rather date the finds after the time when they came to soil/ moss. I do not think that they generally copied old circulated solidus or coins. They surely were inspired by their time. The time of the Constantinians was such a time and we get something from the historians during Valentinian I and Valens. Then it is another thing that as we see from the first Roman medals they have been used for very long and they have been buried or ended in the soil/ moss much later.

We do not know much from the first three-quarter of 5<sup>th</sup> century. Naturally we know about the real Great Migration when the Polish Goths moved from Balkan to southern France. But there were many more. Hieronymus mentions 409 AD that Gallia between the Alps and Pyrenees was invaded by Quados, Vandals, Sarmata, (H)alani, Gepides, Heruli, Saxones, Burgundiones, Alemanni since entire Pannonia was ravaged by the Huns.

In 435 AD de Heruli are with Magister Militum Aetius when the army fought the uproar of the Burgundians. At that time there were many more or less free people/ kingdoms within the Empire and as we know England was lost already. The tribes tried to be as independent as **Attila** with his "state" in the Pannonian/ Hungarian plains. However I doubt that these were the Heruli from Moravia since they lived north of Pannonia/ Hungary. Under Attila people and tribes were sometimes against Attila and sometimes

Attila was in team with the Romans so the overall picture could be confusing. To understand that some tribes were forced to follow Attila at times is easy-

At the Katalunian fields Hunnic warriors were joined by Gepids, Ostrogoths, Rugians, Sciri, Heruli, Danubian Suevi, and Sarmatians, all peoples from beyond the bounds of Roman imperium. Alongside the Romans and led by the experienced Roman general Flavius Aetius were the numerous Germanian groups that had come to live within the bounds of the Roman imperium-Visigoths, Rhenish Franks, Bretons, Burgundians, Gallic Saxons, and Alans. I think some West-Heruli were included in "Germanian groups"

Around 454 AD we note that the Romans called for their foedorati to a final fight against **Attila**. The annals are a little confusing so maybe we should conclude that some Heruli fought against Attila while others were on his side. After Attila's death all Heruli were gathered against his sons. Some of them stayed in Bohemia after those wars.

**Hydatius** from Spain tells that around 455 AD? from the Nordic Ocean came "Vikings" with 7 ships and 400 men made raids on the Cantabrian coast in Spain. Four years later there were raids into Lucentia and Baetica. They call them Heruli, but as said maybe at that time they knew only Heruli from the North. They were maybe Swedes known for their big fleet? In Rome they saw them as pirates but in such cases we should always compare with other forces in the Age of Rome. I do not know what we should call the Roman Barbarians ... do you? It was just the old story that when Rome was weak their neighbours attacked.



*Silver buckle from the Maglemose finds*

From Northern France there are some finds of runes and maybe the "West-Heruli" dwelled near their old friends the Batavians. The finds of buckles with runes from Burgund are maybe from that time. Since we find the Heruli later seeking "shade" under king Euric of the Visigoth we can suppose that the Heruli with Aetius lived in France. Sidonius Apollonius visited Euric's court in 475 AD and he mentions Heruli at the ocean... probably originally Friesians then.

Maybe we could find the place for the Heruli in west if we think that the rune finds is the indication. Then they were in Northern France and Belgium. That is from France Arguel, Sorcy-Bauthemont, Charnay Burgund and from Belgium Arlon, Chehery and Saint Brice.... For picture of the [Burgundian and Langobardian fibula](#)

In 5<sup>th</sup> century we can note from finds together with golden bracts and golden solidus minted for Valentinian III from Svendborg Funen 4, Aalborg 1 and Frauslunda Auland 1 and one from Severus all from West Rome, The later place shows continuity from Honorius 406 - 407 AD to Theodosius I, Marcian and Leo 457 - 474 AD in East Rome.

From East Rome the most in early 5<sup>th</sup> are minted for Theodosius II Bornholm 2, Tjurkau Blekinge 2, Svendborg Funen 1 and Frauslunda 1. The solidus are supposed to be pay for duty in the army while the denars were flowing for several hundred years in trade. However no rule without exception of course.

Before next period we should mention comes (comander) Herila died 462 AD and comes Flavius Theodobius Valila magister utriusque militias 471 AD. That tells us that the Herulian Legion was present within Rome in the middle of 5<sup>th</sup> century. Those living in Rome (Veneti perhaps) were generally Christian we learn from these notes.



## Odovacer and Theoderic

Twenty years after Attila the empire was so weak that some non-Roman could be the ruler. For some reason they always tell about Odoacar as the usurpator in 476 AD. He like many other military caesar / emperor was elected by the army and they came often from the provinces. The Heruli had been foedorati for long and the Rugi moved to Austria during these troubled times. Anyway his reign was fairly long 17 years compared with many of the other military emperors that were shortened. The bureaucracy and administration kept "business as usual".

Jordanes tells **Odoacer, Torcilingorum rex, habens secum Sciros, Herulos diversarumque gentium auxiliarios, Italiam occupavit**

I think that we should interpret SCIRO / SCIRI as "Tribe under agreement within the empire. There are several terms where "foedorati" could mean people beyond the Roman border serving the empire. For the military units we usually use mercenary or legionary, but we should make distinctions between borderers at the castles and troops on the line or moveable troops when needed. Besides were the "laeti" that were stationed near import towns and were farmers in their spare time.

So I would read the Latin text: **Odoacer of the Torcilingi tribe, leader of the Sciri = people under agreement, Heruli and other peoples' auxiliaries = help troops occupied Italy.**

From Paulo Diaconus we learn that Odoacer controlled part of the Rugi when he was at war with Rugian king Feltheus in the 480:ies. So maybe Odoacers and the Torcilingi were a

Rugian tribe. The Rugi moved to Austria and created the Batavian kingdom during the Great Migration. They surely came from Pomerania where we have the finds of the biggest neckrings we know of more than 2 kilos each. So sometimes they were called Heruli like the Friesians.

The historian of Ravenna mentions also the Saracens that must be the synonym for Parthians of which there were three legions in the Roman army. Saracens are known 500 years later in history but they came from the same part of Syria and Northern Iran as known raiders. The Ostrogoths were also supporting Odoacar of course. Most of the old sources speak about Odoacar being of the Heruli, but it is no big issue. Still another general shortened him in 493 AD and Theoderic was not Roman either. Odoacar had no secretary like Cassiodorus to tell the afterworld how great he and his tribes were. The winner always write the history.

Maybe the Roman / Italian pride cannot take that some foreigner became ruler. Yet they always hate those who did the dirty work many times when the Roman generals set the hired foedorati in front at the battle. We should have no special moral valuation about this since from middle of 3<sup>rd</sup> century, since often some military person took the power or was elected by the soldiers.

For some reason the historians in Sweden see **Theoderic I** as a hero while the Danes sing hero songs about Odoacar. The cause is that earlier historians have told that the Goths/ Ostrogoths were from Scandza. It is much like hazard if we mix politics into valuations of ancient times. Soon we stand there and are told we were not objective. Still, late investigations show that the West/ Visi-Goths were from Poland and the Ostrogoths from east of them in Balticum.

Originally **Emperor Zeno** in East Rome settled Odoacer as king of West Rome. But later he altered his mind wanted to get West Rome under the wings of Victoria of Byzantium. Many times the Romans let others do the dirty work so he invoked Theoderic to take Rome. He was originally captured to Constantinople together with his father the Ostrogothic king Tiudimir and he was brought up to be true Roman. Maybe he saw an opportunity to win a place on earth and take West Rome from the Emperor Zeno as thank for the trust.

We should have no moral valuation ... when I think of the Western world being in war continously. He was just a man of the kind that could do such job. There have been many of his kind in the history of the empire. He shoved no scruple in killing everyone in his way. In Byzantium a new kind of "soft rule" was growing so the emperor could not be in the front of his troops.

Anyway Theoderic and the entire Ostrogothic tribe went to fight Odoacar and take back West Rome. There were some fights and there were peace negotiations in Ravenna. According to the legend there was no bones in Odoacar and he was split in two by Theoderic's sword in the year 493 AD. He was using the split-the-body-method they tell.

The drain of Erils in Scandinavia was surely big.. They were people with skills needed in Rome as well as in England during that period. The big move to England was in 477 AD and maybe even some went to Rome when the Heruli were in charge. We can only make qualified guesses about the rising Danes. On Fyn we see the last solidi of Leo 457 - 474 AD and the motif on the Maglemose bracts seem to be of the same age. They were found in a bog and that is the idea of "taken out of circulation".

So maybe we should set the move of Erils in Scandinavia to before 500 AD. It is mentioned by Roman sources that the Erils settled outside the Gauts ... a wide definition. The concept **Dane** seems to be created then. It may have been by the local people/lower class, but can also have been the Sideni (Danes on the other side mentioned by Ptolemy) from North Germany threatened by the other tribes .



*The solidus of Leo I 457 - 474 AD show the same kind of shield with a horse as on the Maglemose bract. The spear symbolises the war god mars as well as the town Constantinople. In Scandinavia they did not make pictures en face that was the new style of Byzantium*

The archaeologists have spent much time on Gotland where the climate favours archaeology. Other interesting parts are creating the centre of the kingdom of the Swedes near Stockholm. They have dug much in Skaane too because there are many finds in a little space and the area with stony buildings and many road is widening all the time. In fact maybe 80 - 90 % of the excavations are done in these places. So our knowledge of ancient Sweden could be better.

However they tell us about some burned places on Auland and Gotland and at the coastal areas of South Sweden in the last half of 5<sup>th</sup> century. We can speculate in those with the fleets from Svealand, i.e. Uppland, but it could also be from the other side of Mare Balticum. There is much yet to be discovered on Auland ... and we have the big golden necklaces of course. They tell us about a very wealthy island.

Up to the Ionian tradition leadership could alter its centre since by principle the highest leader was elected among the upper class. So we should leave open for more than one

supreme place. One of them is surely on Gudme hall at Funen and maybe we should remember the Hoby finds from first century at Lolland. At east Zealand there are several remarkable finds and the Maglemose eight bracts and one motif was made for a Celtic leader with Celtic neckring. Later they build a hall near my favourite place in childhood at West Zealand. It seems to be Celtic/ Eril after-blooming with the find of the spun golden ring weight 2,1 kilos.

Auland would have been strategically the right place for traders and the finds confirm that. The biggest find of late gold coins consists of 79 solidi from the time 451 - 518 AD. They are coined for Marcian, Leo, Zeno and Anastasius and the reign in Constantinople.

Around 508 AD the Langobards the originally lived at Lower Elbe headed for Italy. Maybe the opportunity came when Theoderic got problem with the Franks. Even the Langobards feared the Franks expanding northward. ... se below. They drew out the Heruli from Moravia/ Bohemia and later from Hungary. In 512 AD **Anastacius** gave the Heruli land in Moesia, Dacia and Signidunum Illyria that is Beograd Yugoslavia, while the Langobards for the time being stayed in and Pannonia / Hungary and filled out the endless plains after the Huns.

But parts of the Heruli choose to "go home to Thule". Procopius Book VI, XV tells they travelled via Oder and their friends the Varners at Warne and through the land of the Danes, which were established by then. Even these Heruli settled outside the Gauts and the find at Auland gives us the right to think some of them stayed there.

It is natural to think of East Sweden and also Gautland for the first movement. Normally when we speak about power we should "follow the money". We have the find of 7 kilos raw gold from Timboholm Gautland and the biggest find in Saudermanland at Tureholm. It is mostly in rings and bars 12,5 kilos. But there is also a heavy neckring and gold mountings for at least four swords. It could be gold of the league. Observe that this did not affect Erils in other part of Scandinavia and wherever they had their enclaves and trade routes.

But there is a kind of enigma about the East Sweden. There are only few finds of golden bracts. The Saxones used the bowl shaped fibula, but the [crusiform fibula](#) is like a cultural symbol for Scandinavia and the immigrants to England north of Thames and in Kent. We do not find that in East Gautland, at Gotland or in Svealand but in Helsingland where we have the early hall at Haugom. In East Gautland there is a find of a heavy-armed rider and that is not the "light cavalry" they generalise about. We should not take all facts seriously.

Maybe we should be cautious whenever we hear about immigration and peoples' movements. It is not so sure that everyone moved. Neither it is sure that all people were killed in wars. I saw on TV that there is some "pocket" with old Hunnic culture in the Alps! In those days were plenty of space, so if some tribe move in it is only that it maybe became dominant while the others were forgotten.

Often newcomers are in time assimilated to the old culture. We are for instance searching for Erils and Scandinavians in Yugoslavia no other Europeans search neither the Yugoslavians. But when we set the question on the table it fills out space at least for a while in Scandinavia. But back to the approximate timeline.

In 507 AD Theoderic of Rome got trouble and in reality began the struggle that lasted several hundreds of years between France and Rome/Italy. Chlodvig and the Franks threatened Rome and now Theoderic was forced to seek help from former foedorati including the Heruli. He sent identical letters to the Thüringians, the Heruli and the Varners and asked them for help and these were old friends. He offers his daughter Amalberga to the king of Thüringia. To the king of Heruli he offer to be his "son in armour":

*"King Theoderic to king of Heruli! To be taken as son in armour is a great honour among all tribes, since only the worthy and bravest get this distinction. Our own children often disappoint us. But children we choose by ourselves can not be unfit, since they owe their position not by birth but only by merit*

*... Therefore we want up to the custom of people make you our son and leave you a gift in weapon to You we have seen as a hero. We give you horses, swords, shields and other weapons but most important: We give you our favour. You get appreciation trough the decision of Theoderic and soon you are foremost among people. Take these weapons that would benefit You and me ...*

*... the rest we have told the messengers in our own language. They should explain our letter and orally tell how our friendship could be strengthened.*

Who can resist when the emperor is on his knees and offer the sub-Caesar crown. May this letter tell a little about the tone among equals?

We do not know for sure which Herulian king he means. The Moravian Heruli were in great trouble so it could be some Herulians elsewhere. It could also be the Rugi that sometimes seem to be called Heruli.

We know only the name of Moravian king Rodulf and he died in 510 AD. Meanwhile they settled peace with the Langobardians through marrying the kings daughter Salinga to the Langobardian king Wacco. Their son Walteri became king 540 - 547 in Pannonia while the Moravian Heruli then were in the same place or in Singidunum / Beograd Yugoslavia.. That was quite normally in those days that they fought each other one month and next they made peace and intermarriage or became "son in weapon".

Teoderik died in 526 AD and at the same time Justinian came to power and ruled for nearly 40 years. That means time to get things done. He happened to be powerful and



determined to win back Italy and at the same time win the Arians to Christianity within his empire. Many tribes were Arians and he forced them to Christianity or fought them down like the Vandals in Africa.

Maybe the "three king meeting" in 528 AD caused that the Herulian king Ochus was assassinated. The Heruli wanted a new king from their relatives in Sweden? of the right blood. So we get the bonds to Sweden and they sent a delegation for a new king. The first choice died on the way to Singidunum / Beograd. They went back for another and got another Todasius and his brother Aordus and 200 young men as escort.

In the meantime Justinian arranged another king named Suartua and he is mentioned later in the Herulian army. When the Todasius and the suite came he fled to Constantinople since He Heruli naturally wanted Todasius. This split the Heruli into two fractions and the bigger part followed Todasius and Aordus to the Gepids in 545 AD.

Here I note that they were still bound to their roots. We can draw that back to the fact that they however spread over Europe still had some kind of Supreme in Scandinavia. Then they surely practised the same kind of league even in Scandinavia as long as they were in balance with local people.

Another thing is that they were two leaders. This is an old tradition even at times in Rome but we also reminds of the fact that the first leaders to England came in pair. That was surely a good thing once they were homeward bound and in their main profession. They simply needed a vice. In Rome it was nearly rule with two leaders.

Justinian build a church in [Breza](#) Bosnia for the Heruli and maybe for the Langobards too. Here we can quote a few lines from an article by Dr. T. Looijenga "Who wrote the Breza futhark, and why?"

"The Langobards therefore seem to have lived in the Breza region from around 535 until 567 AD, some thirty years. One of these is, I think, the most likely candidate to have cut this futhark in the column."

Maybe we should rather say that some in the Herulian suite wrote it on the half-pillar in the Church of Breza Emperor Justinian build at this time. There is also a pillar with Latin alphabet and it seems to have been custom. The pillar fragment is less than two feet high and the text is 1 - 2 inches high in freehand. Again we get an opportunity to connect the runes to the Heruli.

From Moravia are two finds from Asch and Hauspach and more from Hungary on four finds of fibulas with runes and on one of them half of the original furthark = rune alphabet and three golden bracts of the ordinary Nordic type. There is as far as I know one rune find from Rubring Austria too. As we see the rune finds are all from places where we know the Heruli have been at some time.



## The Light Cavalry

Around 45 % of the golden bracts are of the rider bract type and they are spread not only in Southern Scandinavia but also in Pomeriana, Friesland and the places where the Heruli have been. These bracts were advertising about the riders in the Roman Empire and maybe some young man became voluntary. Such profession demanded for money and the free will to join the army for 25 years. For the young it was the real adventure.

They were called "light cavalry" since the normal weapon was the spear and the shield and a short sword. They surely met the Parthian influences in the [Cavalry](#) as seen in a series of golden bracts. That maybe quite early influence since we see it from the helmet of Varanhan II from third century. The Parthians were the heavy riders with either heavy sword or the specialists with bow.

Gotland and Auland belonged to the real League of the Erils in Scandinavia we see from the finds. We also see import via the east route on Gotland. On Auland they think some fortifications are copied from the Dacian border. The latest find is the Roman bath. The gold work they surely learned from the Greeks and maybe in Olbia

The Heruli continued their co-operation with the Romans under the reign of Justinian One of the last Heruli with a name is **Duke Fara of Bavaria**/ Austria d. 535 AD. Another and for someone better known Bavarian duke Fara II is also considered to have had Herulic ancestry, i.e. son of Fara I maybe. He ruled in north Bavaria, i.e. the area of modern Wuerzburg and a third Bavarian duke, Theodo is considered to be the son of the Sinduald who died around 568AD? See Sinduald below

I think we could speculate in the Bible Argentus / Silver Bible the Swedes "brought home" during the 30-years war from Austria. They think it was made in Ravenna Veneti in beginning of 6<sup>th</sup> century. Veneti was the place for the Herulian Legion. I suggest that Duke Fara of Bavaria was Arian and he had the money and power to get the **Arian Wulfila's Bible** made at that time ... we always get the impression that Christianity began in full scale at a certain date. In practise it was a process that lasted for hundreds of years even in the Roman Empire.

We understand that there were bonds to the Rugi in Bavaria all the time. Fara I was commander of the Herulian cavalry in Dara, Anatolia with 300 riders and became Magister Militium in 532 AD. Later he was with 400 Heruli in the war against Persia.

Fara I was in Africa against the Vandali 533 - 534 AD. We get different data but maybe there was a legion of foot soldiers since they mention 1000 men. It could even be the Cimbri Legion. The Vandali were Arians and some of the Heruli / Cimbri were Arians

too. Although at that time many Heruli were Catholic. Emperor Justinian made a special drive in 527 AD to convert all within the Roman Empire.

After Fara they mention Philimuth as comes of the Herulian Cavalry. In 537 AD the wars against the East Goths begins and the eunuch **Narses** became Supreme Commander for East Rome and he enrolled 2000 Herulians. Then they mention places as Caesena and Venetia in Italy, Armenia and Tarvisos with most of them killed. In 542 - 543 AD they were in a new war against Persia.

For the last wars they moved to Italy in 547 AD. They were in the **Battle of Taginae** (Gualdo Tadino) in 552 AD against **Totila**. Emperor Justinian in Constantinople let his general Narses assign the Langobards (7000) and one source tells about 3000 on foot and 1500 in cavalry of the Heruli "...under Philemuth, their native chief and under the noble Roman Aratus. The later adopted the manners and discipline of Rome, conducted a band of veterans of the same nation" (Gibbon). These together with the Byzantine troops should drive out king Totila and the Ostrogoths from Italy. These forces outnumbered the Ostrogoths and seemingly they used an old classic strategy.

The departure of the Heruli from the Scene of History is everything else than glorious. They got a new commander Sindual and were in battles against the Franks in 554 - 567 AD. After that they came back to Italy. Sindual got the idea to "make an Odoacar" or continue the "tradition" that the army elected emperors in Rome. It was a new time and Narses order was to bring Italy under the reign of Constantinople. So Narses made something like "a Theoderic" and Sindual was shortened. Naturally the Heruli lost their face and that is the end of story.

Even in Scandinavia they faded out when they lost their best part of Scandinavia. On Gotland we see the shift in culture when we look at the tomb stone stones in symbolic style. Until around 600 AD the style is the same symbolic style as in the golden bracts and other jewellery. In 8<sup>th</sup> century begins the picture period for maybe 200 years

... and after that in way they all over Scandinavian go back to the symbolic style. But in that short period they tell bout some of the Edda sagas and mythic figures we know ... but not the same as in the style of Erils. Besides that we see the Vendel style and that the nobility copied the military style they learned in Rome.

The Heruli /Erils are since long forgotten. Many historians describe them only as a little tribe somewhere in Scandinavia. I do not believe in that when I weigh together the facts. "The winner takes it all" and losers are forgotten. The fact that we cannot really tie them to a landscape make it also difficult, however the Norse and some landscape "outside the Gauts" want to own them.

It is obvious that the Erils did not die without heirs. They simply changed colours and came again when it was time for that. Maybe they learnt the lesson that in a sparsely populated land the nobility needs the people so they buried their golden neck-rings. The

crew on a ship needs to be equal and they changed their horses to seahorses and became Vikings.

From the Nordic point of view the Viking Age was defending us from the aims Holy Roman Empire enslaving us. The runes were saved during the Dark Age but became a tool too point out "Here I am", my family own this place as we see it on rune stones later on ... but that is another story.

Some researchers deny totally the Herulian roots in Scandinavia. They place them as a Gothic tribe at lower Donau. However the Roman sources used Heruli as name of the Scandinavians since besides the Cimbri it was the only name they knew. In 3<sup>rd</sup> century they place some Heruli on the other side of Rhine and probably there was some enclave there or they gathered to help the Alemanni against Gaul. Hydatius name the "Vikings" Heruli in Spain around 459 AD.

Furthermore they deny parts of Jordanes, Procopius and in second hand Cassiodorus writing about Heruli in Scandinavia and that under Justinian they brought a king of the "right blood" from Scandinavia to rule the Heruli within the empire. In Scandinavia we see the Rome and emperor connection in the gold medals and golden bracts.

The history of Heruli could not be written using only few Greek and Roman written sources. Conclusion must be made as synthesis of written sources artefacts and other remains. Then we see that Scandinavian Erils furnished Rome with mercenaries and the voluntaries must have been taken from a large area. There must also have been capital behind to train the soldiers in first stage. These are things are not easy to see since they are depending of deep analysis of the scenario. There is plenty of space for discussion and fantasy.

Even Nordic historians want to see the Heruli as a small tribe on the Danish islands. But from the very beginning the Norse were involved and the only exception is East Sweden with few finds belonging to the Eril culture from the start. The base broadened in time as we also see from the import of Roman goods.

On the other hand after the departure from history Denmark, Norway and partly Sweden want the monopoly on the Heruli. As I see it the history belongs to them all since the rest of the Heruli seems to have settled in East Sweden in 6<sup>th</sup> century so the "white spot" was filled then. We are looking at 600 years of history. At that time there were no nation borders. The Great Migration shows us that people were moveable and it was no big affair to seek new settlement in East Sweden or England. The data are few so we have no grip of the proportions.

Finally a curio from our time. Naturally I have been surfing and once I tried on Google "Daniel Heruli" and got 718 URL telling about the heresy of the Heruli now 1500 years after the happenings. The heresy hunters have read Daniel 7:7-8 and see the "10 horns"

Huns, Ostrogoths, Visigoths, Franks, Vandals, Suevi, Burgundians, Heruli, Anglo-Saxons, and Lombards ... and worst of all are the "3 horns" Vandal, Ostrogoths and Heruli

Naturally the cause is Arianism. Little those writers care for the fact that the Heruli fought the Vandali, Ostrogoths, Franks, Ostrogoths, Huns and gave their blood for Rome. I practise the UN Human Rights including freedom of religion and that includes our forefathers and with some difficulty these heresy-hunters. I cannot stand that they do not care for history and give credit to the Heruli. They are writing false history. That I cannot stand without laughing. That is my sense of right for everyone even in the past.