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FROM PAGANISM TO CHRISTIANITY

BURIAL RITES DURING THE TRANSITION PERIOD

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Preface

One of the subjects of particular interest to archaeologists is burial customs and how they change over time. The subject of burial covers a very wide range of topics and can reveal not only beliefs, traditions and rituals, but also the economic status, social status, sex and age differences of the deceased. Perhaps the most significant periods are those of transformation when one tradition is replaced by another. In this way, changes reflect different processes that took place in society. One of the most striking of these transformations was the transition from paganism to Christianity, both in Lithuania and the neighbouring countries. The custom of cremation, prevalent in many countries, was replaced by the Christian practice of inhumation. In eastern Lithuania, the transition to inhumation took place between the 13th and 15th centuries, in parallel with the Christianisation of the country. The same processes can be observed in neighbouring regions, even though changes in their belief system took place earlier.

Studies into burial practices constantly raise new questions. Moreover, research in this field is driven not only by the discovery of new burial monuments but also by the ever-expanding range of topics. Contemporary historiography is not limited to the publication of the archaeological record from burial sites. Rather, it seeks to explore issues such as burial features, the topography of burial sites, as well as social aspects and symbolism. As new research methods by the exact sciences continue to be developed, a great deal of attention is spent on their application to archaeological studies. The experience of other countries, especially our closest neighbours, is of great value and opens up new research perspectives. The first Christians came to Lithuania from Latvia (Livonia) and Ukraine (Kievan Rus'), bringing with them the tradition of inhumation. In the Middle Ages, parts of present-day Ukraine, Belarus and Russia formed part of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, and the people who came from there were subjects of the grand

dukes. Therefore, the material from the neighbouring regions is essential for comparison and helps to better understand the course of Christianisation in Lithuania. Without the wider context, a thorough understanding and interpretation of the situation in Lithuania would not be possible.

In recognising the importance and interest in the topic, an international conference entitled 'From Paganism to Christianity. Burial rites during the transition period' took place on 11–12 October 2021 at the Lithuanian Institute of History. The event featured 25 presentations by archaeologists, historians and anthropologists from seven countries, including Lithuania, Ukraine, Latvia, Poland, Germany, Belarus and Russia. During the conference, the idea was generated to publish these studies as a collection of articles under the same title. World events changed the implementation of this idea dramatically: the preparation of the collection of articles took three years, and the war in Ukraine resulted in the exclusion of articles from Russian and Belarusian scientific institutions. Nevertheless, we are pleased to present to the public a high-quality publication reflecting the latest trends in the research of burial monuments in Lithuania and Europe. A total of 13 articles are presented by scholars from Lithuania, Latvia, Poland, Ukraine and Germany.

The collection of articles is divided thematically into four sections: Between Paganism and Christianity, Burial Rites, Grave Goods, and Cemetery Investigations. The first chapter is devoted to the discussion of the juxtaposition of pagan and Christian customs in the burial record. Two articles contain a review of data from Vilnius, presenting burial grounds that are associated with the Catholics and Orthodox, the first Christians to settle there. R. Jonaitis discusses Medieval urban burial sites of the 13th to 15th centuries, while I. Kaplūnaitė examines the probable locations of the earliest Catholic cemeteries in the growing city of Vilnius. The

next two articles examine the relics of paganism in burials: M. Ščavinskas interprets written sources dated to the 12th to the 16th centuries, which refer to some of the burial rituals that were performed in Christian cemeteries but were interpreted as being pagan by the authors of these sources. In the next article, D. Bibikov presents the practice of partial/incomplete cremation, linking it to the processes of Christianisation of Eastern Slavic lands.

In the second chapter in the collection of articles, devoted to the characteristics of funerary customs, M. Plavinski examines the development of Slavic burial traditions at the turn of the first and second millennium. Based on long-term studies of the Upper Neris region, the author identifies three main stages of development. S. Wadył and E. Jaskulska present a unique early Medieval burial practice from northeastern Poland. Here, archaeological excavations have revealed human remains that have been interred in living spaces. B. Bartecki, B. Borowska, T. Dzieńkowski, I. Hajdas, A. Hyrczała and M. Wołoszyn present the Early medieval burial grounds of Gródek-Volyn, which contain inhumations, and discuss the results of the research carried out there. Their study provides new insights into the burial features of the border area between Medieval Poland and Ruthenia.

The third chapter in the book contains articles on the analysis of grave goods. The material record from Latvia is presented in an article by R. Spirģis, who analyses finds from children's graves that were dated to between the 11th and 13th centuries. The author suggests that the presence of personal devotional objects and coins in graves should be considered in the context of Christianisation. The theme of children is further developed by V. Makouskaya, who studies grave goods found in children's graves from the tenth to the 12th centuries in the Polotsk region. She analyses the links between changes in the tradition of grave good deposition and the age

of the deceased, in this way identifying stages of childhood and puberty.

The fourth chapter is devoted to research material from burial grounds and their analysis. L. Jończyk examines the case of the last Yotvingian pagans from the Mosiężysko burial ground in northeastern Poland. The archaeological record from Lithuania is analysed by J. Račas, who presents archaeological investigations of the Punžionys burial site, which was used after the official baptism of Lithuania. The last two articles are devoted to the unique burial site of Ostriv, located near Kyiv in Ukraine, which is associated with the Baltic heritage. R. Shiroukhov, V. Baranov, V. Ivakin, B. Krause-Kyora, J. Meadows, K. Saleem and U. Schuermann discuss the results of the last five years of research on this burial site. Finally, O. Kozak discusses the diseases and migration processes of the community that rests in the burial site of Ostriv.

This collection of articles is the first of its kind in Lithuania and is devoted exclusively to burial

customs in the period of transition from paganism to Christianity. The articles present the results of research in Lithuania as well as in neighbouring countries, which were closely connected to the history of Lithuania during the Middle Ages. The collection may, therefore, be of interest to archaeologists, historians, anthropologists and, as experience shows, to the wider public.

We would like to thank the administration of the Lithuanian Institute of History, the publishing team and its head, Mindaugas Maskoliūnas, and our colleagues in the Department of Urban Research for the successful publication of the book and all their support. We are very grateful to all the authors of the articles and the large number of reviewers. We would also like to express our gratitude in advance to every future reader.

The editors