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FROM PAGANISM TO CHRISTIANITY

BURIAL RITES DURING THE TRANSITION PERIOD

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The Last Yotvingian Pagans. The Case of the Mosiężysko Cemetery in Northeast Poland¹

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The paper gives an overview of the results of an analysis of archaeological investigations at the Mosiężysko site 8 at Szurpiły in northeast Poland, a cemetery with dispersed cremation burials. Significant quantities of burnt human bones, pottery sherds and metal objects were found in the humus layer. The site is dated to the 12th and 13th centuries.

The results are compared with other cemeteries in the Czarna Hańcza Group (a cluster of sites dated to the ninth to 13th centuries, encompassing the territories between Elk and Marijampolė along a SW–NE axis, and between Gołdap and Augustów along a NW–SE axis), and other Baltic and Finno-Ugrian sites. The possible relations with Christianity are also discussed.

Keywords: burial rites, cemeteries with dispersed burials, multiple burials, Czarna Hańcza Group, Yotvingia, Old Prussia.

Introduction

For many years, the understanding of the funeral customs practiced by the Early Medieval Old Prussians relied primarily on data derived from the Sambian Peninsula. The local cemeteries, which have been known and studied since the 19th century, provided extensive information about funeral rites

and the rich material culture. However, defining the specific characteristics of the burial practices of the Old Prussians who inhabited the territories of present-day northeast Poland proved to be a more challenging undertaking, due to the limited availability of data.

¹ This paper was written as part of the project funded by the National Science Centre, Project No. 2019/33/N/HS3/00167.

In relation to the cemeteries associated with the Yotvingians,² the easternmost tribe of the Old Prussians, the earlier literature contains only two references made by authors of major syntheses, who arrived at completely contrasting conclusions. The initial effort to characterise this matter was undertaken by Carl Engel and Wolfgang la Baume.³ Based on several sites in the vicinity of Gołdap and Olecko, they considered flat cemeteries with pit graves and the *Aschenplätze*, which are layered cemeteries known from the Sambian Peninsula, as typical of the Eastern Mazurian group they identified. Nearly ten years later, Maria Alseikaitė-Gimbutienė regarded the cemetery at Jasudowo in the Sopoćkinie district as representative of Yotvingia, and saw Jasudowo barrows with cremation urn burials as characteristic of the entire region.⁴ Years later, Wojciech Nowakowski addressed this topic, and cautiously hypothesised that layered cemeteries may be typical of the Early Medieval Yotvingians based on research conducted at the Burdyniszki site.⁵ Faced with such divergent information, researchers believed that the funeral rituals of the Yotvingians (as well as of other Old Prussian tribes, excluding the Sambians) remained archaeologically elusive.⁶

This significant disparity of perspectives arose from two factors. Firstly, there was a tendency to analyse archaeological data within territorial units delineated by historians, rather than determining cultural affiliations based on archaeological sources.

Secondly, the state of the research itself was rather limited. The situation began to change in the early 21st century, when, thanks to the increased use of metal detectors, sepulchral objects associated with the Yotvingians began to be discovered in the Suwałki region. The initial archaeological investigations of Early Medieval cemeteries in this area took place at two sites in the settlement complex at Szurpiły. One of these sites was Mosiężysko.

Research methodology

Inductive analysis was utilised to establish a comprehensive description of the funerary customs observed at Mosiężysko. Data collected during the excavations has been employed to delineate the material, spiritual and societal aspects of the community associated with the site. The resulting depiction underwent a classic archaeological analysis, incorporating chronological and cultural considerations, while also searching for similarities in other regions of Early Medieval settlements along the southeast Baltic shore. In order to avoid the methodological error of arbitrarily imposing boundaries reconstructed solely from historical sources on to the analysis of archaeological evidence, the decision was made to adopt territorial boundaries based on the visible extent of the cluster of Early Medieval settlements depicted on the point map (Fig. 1).

2 This community is known by various names in different historical sources. In Polish and Ruthenian sources, they are referred to as Jaćwingowie (transliterated into English as Yatvings/Yotvingians). In German sources, they are called Sudavians. Polish sources also mention the term Pollexiani, while some Lithuanian documents refer to them as Deynove, both of which are also associated with the same people or their territory. See: S. Zajączkowski, O nazwach ludu Jaćwingów, *Zapiski Towarzystwa Naukowego w Toruniu*, XVIII, 1952.

3 C. Engel, W. la Baume, *Kulturen und Völker der Frühzeit im Preußenlande*, Königsberg, 1937, p. 194.

4 M. Alseikaitė-Gimbutienė, *Die Bestattung in Litauen in der vorgeschichtlichen Zeit*, Tübingen, 1946, pp. 83–84.

5 W. Nowakowski, Jaćwięskie cmentarzysko warstwowe (?) w miejscowości Burdyniszki, na Suwalszczyźnie, *Studia z dziejów cywilizacji*, ed. A. Buko, Warszawa, 1998, pp. 120–121.

6 W. Wróblewski, *Aschenplätze – the Forgotten Burial Rituals of the Old Prussians*, *Archaeologia Lituana* 7, 2006, p. 221.

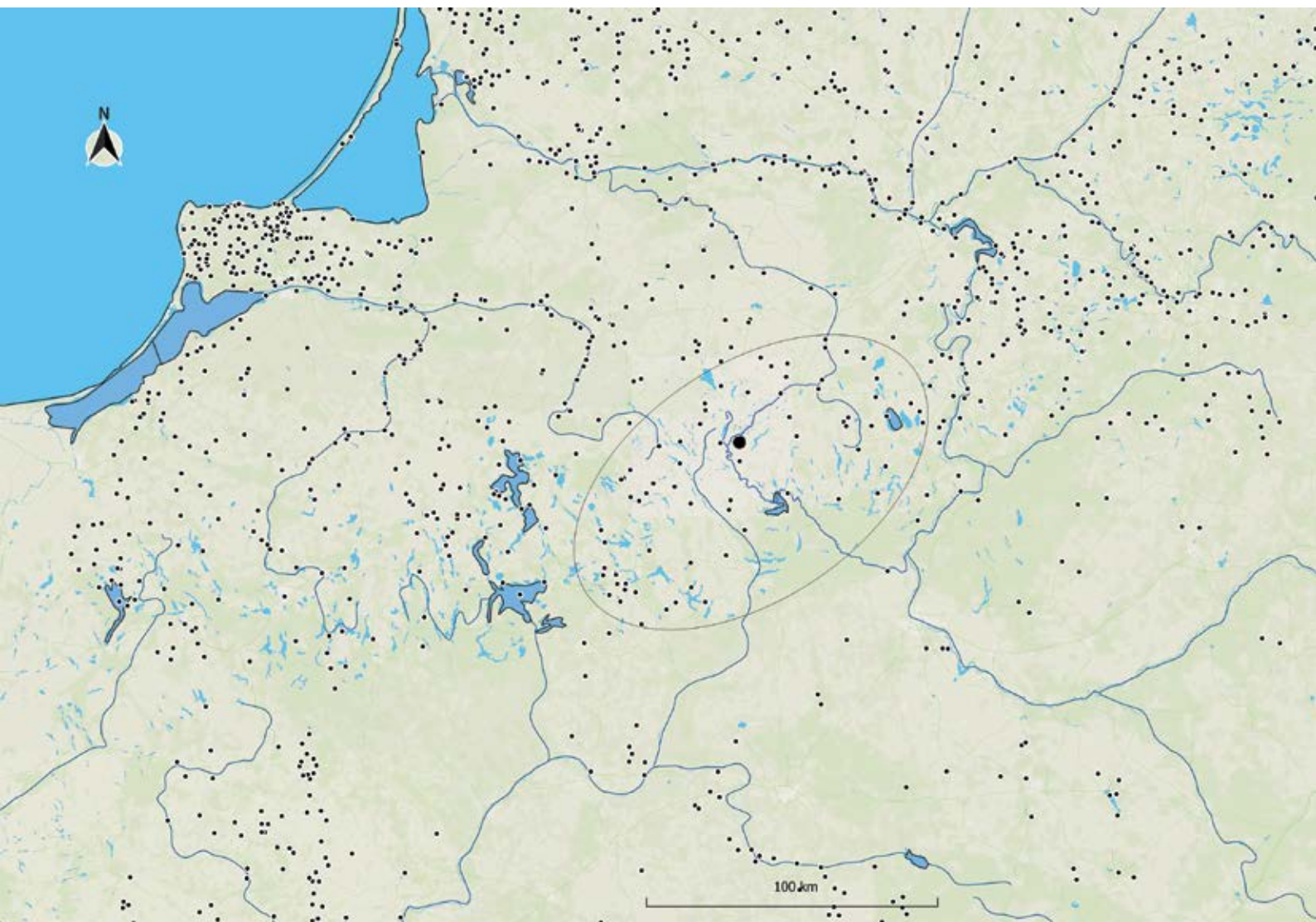


Fig. 1. The expansion of the settlement dated to the ninth to the 13th century of the Pruthenian and adjacent areas. The area of the Czarna Hańcza Group is marked by an outline. The settlement complex at Szurpiły is marked with a bigger dot. Map by L. Jończyk.

The Mosiężysko cemetery at Szurpiły

The settlement micro-region in Szurpiły (Suwałki district) is an exceptional place on the map of northeast Poland. It is located in the very centre of the Czarna Hańcza Group, that is, a cluster of sites dated to the Early Middle Ages (ninth to 13th century). This cluster encompasses approximately the territories between Ełk and Mariampolė along a SW–NE axis, and between Gołdap and Augustów along a NW–SE axis (Fig. 1). The extent of the cluster fits within the borders of Yotvingia that were delineated by historians:⁷ east of the Great Masurian Lakes to the middle River Nemunas in the east, the River Szeszupa in the north, and the River Biebrza to the south. The territory does not directly border the aforementioned watercourses, and the settlement range that has been recorded so far is clearly smaller than that marked on the basis of written sources.

Since the mid-19th century, subsequent researchers have returned to Szurpiły every couple of decades. Anyone interested in the past of the Suwałki region or Yotvingia found their way there sooner or later. What we call today the settlement complex at Szurpiły are first of all the remains of the stronghold, settlements, and cemeteries of people from the Early Middle Ages, that is, since the turn of the ninth and tenth centuries to the late 13th century, or possibly also to the early 14th century (Fig. 2), although the settlement history in this place is clearly longer.⁸

During planigraphic examinations with the use of metal detectors in the spring of 2008, an unexpected discovery of a distinct cluster of metal finds

was made at the edge of a previously known settlement. This place is known locally as Mosiężysko (Brass Ground), which soon became the name of the newly discovered site too. In less than four working hours, 111 artefacts were extracted in an area of about ten ares. What is more, a considerable number of other signals was located. No further survey in this place was carried out, as it was realised that an atypical site had been discovered. In line with the state of knowledge of those days, it was believed that funeral rites in this region were not identifiable archaeologically. Therefore, it was assumed that the finds discovered were the remains of a bronze workshop. Excavations at the site were launched in July 2008. Small burnt human bones were soon found, which is why the examined site was considered to be a cemetery.

The necropolis was established partially in the area of moraine till, a natural geological form which often occurs in the area. On the other hand, the southern part of the cemetery extends beyond the till, and reaches the edge of a pond, although without crossing it. A search in the marshy ground demonstrated the lack of archaeological finds such as bones, pottery and metal artefacts. The site location is also remarkable concerning land management: the cemetery is situated in the direct vicinity of areas that were used for economic purposes. Surveys in arable fields to the east and south of the discussed site yielded pottery shards and individual special finds, including some which were chronologically convergent with the cemetery in question. In the area neighbouring the cemetery to the northeast, a trench at a distance of 45 metres from the identified northeast border of

7 H. Łowmiański, *Prusy pogańskie*, Toruń, 1935, p. 20; A. Kamiński, *Jaćwież. Terytorium, ludność, stosunki gospodarcze i społeczne*, Łódź, 1953, pp. 37–62; A. Kamiński, *Materiały do bibliografii archeologicznej Jaćwieży od I do XIII w.*, *Materiały Starożytne* 1, 1956, the map; J. Tyszkiewicz, *Jaćwież wczesnośredniowieczna. Pomiędzy Niemnem, Biebrzą i Gołdapią, czyli przeciw legendom, Świat pogranicza*, ed. M. Nagielski, A. Rachuba, S. Górzynski, Warszawa, 2003, pp. 59–62; W. Nowakowski, “Kurzhanen Jaćwiegów” – kilkadziesiąt lat naukowego mitu, *Światowit* IX (L)/B, 2011, p. 181; W. Nowakowski, *The Roots of the Yotvingians – Archaeological Traces of a Baltic Tribe in the North-Eastern Poland*, *Archaeologia Polona* 48, 2015, pp. 21–22; M. Engel, *Jaćwieskie ośrodki grodowe*, Warszawa, 2020, p. 15.

8 M. Engel, C. Sobczak, *Nie tylko archeologia. Interdyscyplinarne badania wielokulturowego zespołu osadniczego w Szurpiłach na Suwalszczyźnie, Pruthenia* VII, 2012, pp. 137–57; M. Engel, *Jaćwieskie ośrodki grodowe*, pp. 68–70, 127–74.

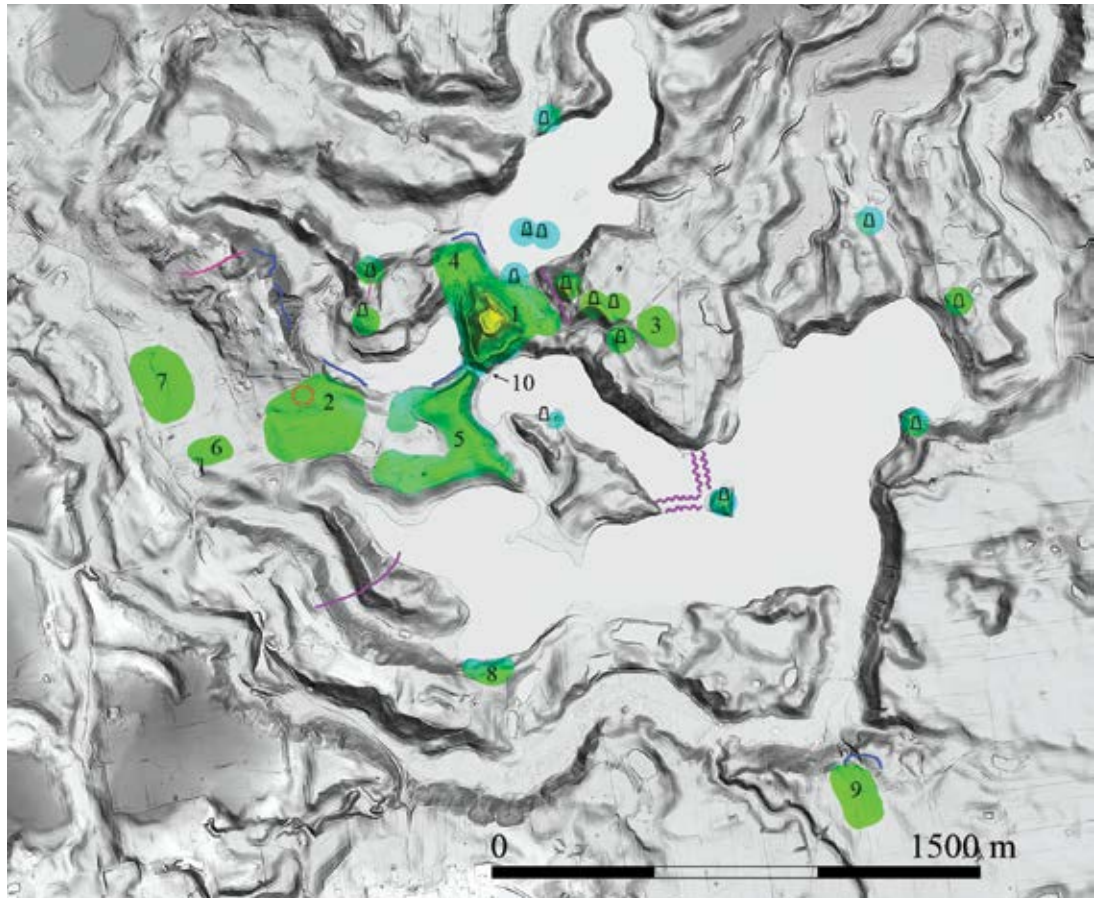


Fig. 2. Sites dated to the Early Middle Ages in the Szurpiły settlement complex. Cemeteries are marked by red circles; dykes are marked by purple zigzag lines; intentionally steep slopes are marked by blue lines; watchtower mounds are marked by trapeziums: 1 – the Góra Zamkowa (Castle Hill) hillfort; 2 – the Mosiężysko settlement and cemetery; 3–9 – settlements; 10 – the channel between Lake Kluczyško and Jodel bay; after Engel 2020, Table I with additions.

the necropolis was examined. What was recorded there were archaeological features and a settlement layer. The very numerous slag finds indicate that there was iron-processing activity in the vicinity of the place. This area was in use at the same time as the necropolis.

Cemeteries were often established close to water, both by the Balts and by neighbouring peoples.⁹ Such a location is usually explained by the belief that, on their way to the other world, the dead had to cross a water barrier that separated them from the world of the living. This somewhat natural interpretation

⁹ H. Zoll-Adamikowa, *Wczesnośredniowieczne cmentarzyska ciałopalne Słowian na terenie Polski. Cz. II. Analiza. Wnioski*, Wrocław–Warszawa–Kraków–Gdańsk, 1979, pp. 27–29; P. Uino, *Ancient Karelia. Archaeological Studies*, Helsinki, 1997, p. 55; A. Svestad, *The Impact of Materiality on Sámi Burial Customs and Religious Concepts*, *Fennoscandia Archaeologica* XXVIII, 2011, pp. 43–44; G. Petrauskas, *Mirusiųjų deginimo paprotys viduramžių Lietuvoje: kompleksinis požiūris į XIII–XIV a. degintinius kapinynus*, *Lietuvos Archeologija* 43, 2017, pp. 190–91.

has also been confirmed by ethnographic interviews.¹⁰ Concerning Mosiężysko, this explanation of the cemetery's location close to a pond cannot be used, as the pond merely separates the cemetery and part of the settlement.

A location in the landscape close to water and on a slope is nothing unusual. On the other hand, it is a rare phenomenon that the cemetery is situated in the direct vicinity of a settlement, almost within settlement features that were in use in the same time. Burials within the settlement context occur in almost every epoch, and in a broad cultural area, but they are hardly a rule.¹¹ The closest analogy to the Mosiężysko necropolis is offered by a grave at Góra Zamkowa (Castle Hill) in Szurpiły (Fig. 2:1) dated to the 11th c. which was situated on the slope of the stronghold that was in use in the same period. Concerning other Pruthenian territories, an analogous approach can be found in the case of burials discovered in the stronghold of Szestno-Czarny Las (Mrągowo district).¹²

A surface of 156.25 square metres was examined by excavation over four years. The humus layer turned out to be the main object of research. Its thickness varied from about 20 to 30 centimetres in the southern part of the trench to about 35 centimetres in the northern part. A total of 19 small and very shallow (up to ten or at most 12 centimetres deep) archaeological features in irregular shapes were recorded under the humus. Various arrangements of stones were also found. Stones that were numerous deposited at the site were translocated by people, although it is often difficult to determine unambiguously the scope of this transformation. A regular cobbling in a shape

close to the letter L was discovered in the northern part of the trench. The pavement along the NE–SW line is 7.5 metres long and three metres wide, while the cobbling along the NW–SE line is eight metres long and 3.5 metres wide. The cobbling's borders are marked by medium-size and large stones, while medium-size and small stones are abundantly deposited in its central part.

Finds

Almost all the finds came from the humus layer, from its very surface to the bottom. A total of 1,745 special finds (almost all of them metal objects), with a total weight of 2,216.61 grams, were found in the trench. Of these finds, 671 were discovered in the course of the exploration, and were recorded in 3D (Fig. 3). Apart from the special finds, 9,945 pottery fragments with a total weight of 18.17 kilograms (Fig. 4) and 6,885.13 grams of burnt human bones (Fig. 5) were discovered in the trench. A small portion of all this material came from archaeological features that were identified: these finds included 19 metal artefacts (1% of all those found in the trench), 156 vessel shards (1.6% of pottery from the trench) and 315.5 grams of burnt human bones (4.6% of all the bones from the trench).

The concentration of all these categories of find in the trench was not even. The highest concentration of bones, pottery and metal artefacts can be seen in the southwest part of the trench. This small space encompassed 8% of the trench's surface, but it yielded 30.7% of the metal finds from the trench,

10 H. Zoll-Adamikowa, *Wczesnośredniowieczne cmentarzyska ciałopalne Słowian na terenie Polski. Cz. II. Analiza. Wnioski*, p. 29; A. Svestad, *The Impact of Materiality on Sámi Burial Customs and Religious Concepts*, pp. 43–44; G. Petrauskas, *Mirusiųjų deginimo paprotys viduramžių Lietuvoje: kompleksinis požiūris į XIII–XIV a. degintinius kapinynus*, pp. 193–94, 202.

11 F. Gogăltan, S.-C. Ailincăi, eds., *Settlements of Life and Death. Studies from Prehistory to Middle Ages*, Cluj-Napoca, 2016.

12 W. Wróblewski, *Ossa Cremata. Obrządek pogrzebowy Galindów we wczesnym średniowieczu w świetle znalezisk na grodzisku w Szestnie – Czarnym Lesie, Światowit II (XLIII)*, fasc. B, 2000, pp. 268–85.

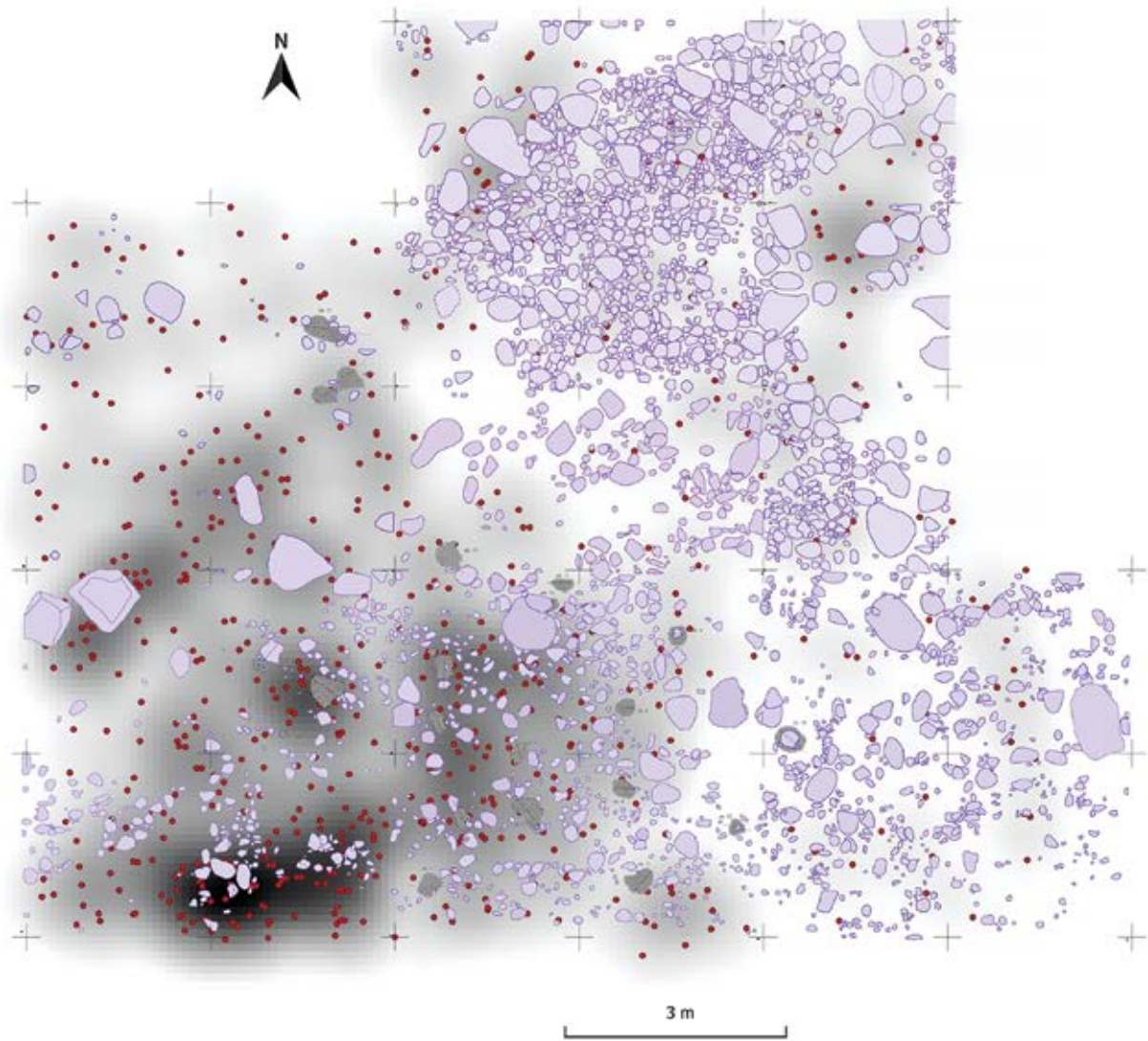


Fig. 3. The kernel density of metal finds with three-dimensional localisation.
Drawing by L. Jończyk.

28.7% of the clay vessel fragments, and 23.6% of the burnt human bones. Although the general tendency is similar, there are also visible differences in the frequency of the occurrence of individual kinds of find in specific zones.

The only possible interpretation of the discovered artefacts, which in most cases bear traces of intentional destruction, followed by secondary contact with high temperature, is to assume that they were

part of the furnishings of the dead whose remains were deposited at the site.

During all the research seasons, a search with the use of metal detectors was also carried out in the southern part of the site that was destroyed by ploughing. A cluster of finds with a surface of about 1,000 square metres was identified. As a result of the field surveys, 1,732 metal finds were discovered and recorded.

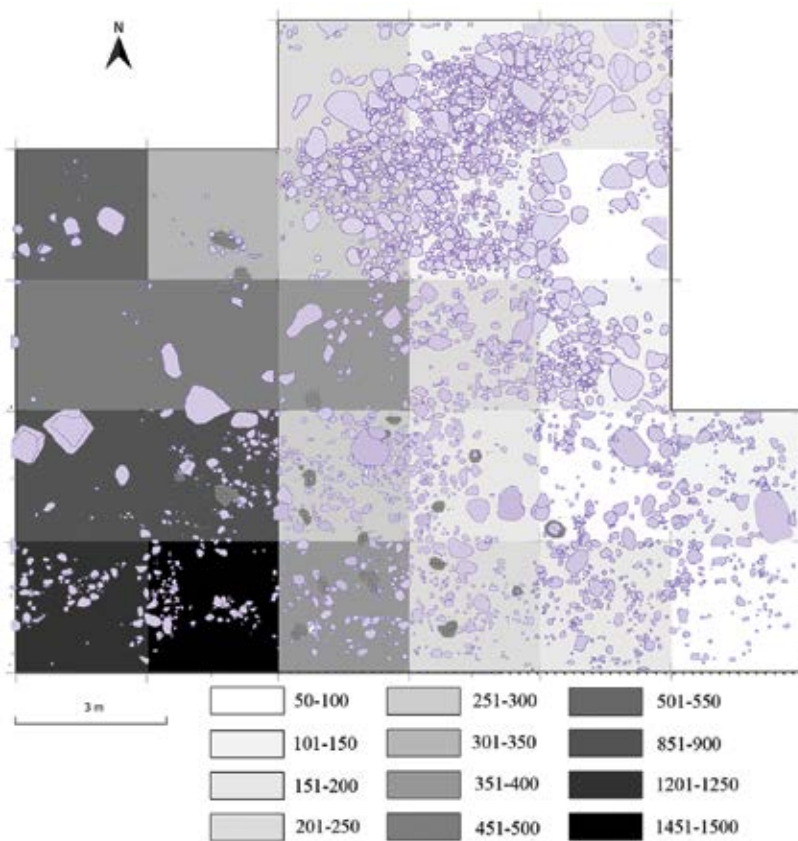


Fig. 4. A plan of the trench in the light of the results of the analysis of the spread of pottery sherds based on the number of finds. Drawing by L. Jończyk.

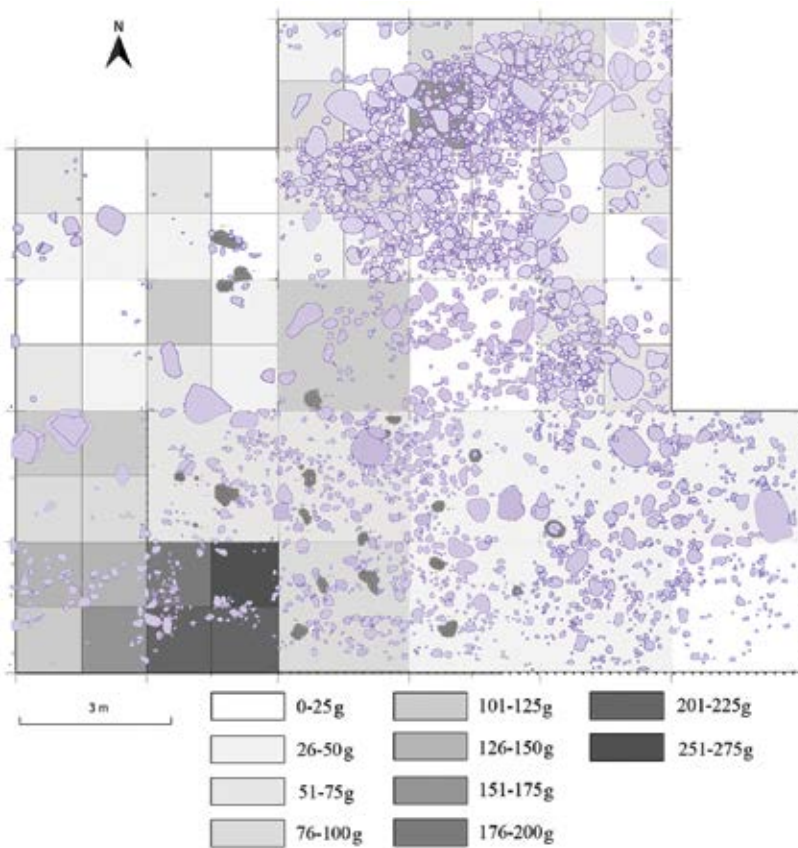


Fig. 5. A plan of the trench in the light of results of the analysis of the spread of burnt human bones based on the total weight of finds. Drawing by L. Jończyk.

Fragments of *Totenkrone*-type necklaces were the most numerous among the finds (Fig. 6:1–2). These ornaments were typical of the Early Medieval Pruthenians,¹³ and they were 53% of all the special finds. Other frequent finds were pendants made from bronze sheet (Fig. 6:3) or of iron (Fig. 6:4), bronze crosslets with enamel (Fig. 6:5), small bells of different types (Fig. 6:6–7), penannular brooches (in most cases with zoomorphic (Fig. 6:9) and thickening terminals (those with cylindrical, button-shaped, poppy head-shaped or polygonal terminals were less common), belt parts (Fig. 6:10), and small dress fittings. Less common finds included ringlets (Fig. 6:8), bracelet fragments, pins, and individual glass beads. The number of weaponry finds was relatively low: four fragments of spearheads, two axe fragments, two stirrup fragments (Fig. 6:11), five spur fragments (Fig. 6:12) and parts of their fasteners, as well as individual chainmail rings. On the other hand, there were many tools, such as knives, spindle whorls, awls and needles, the latter being less numerous.

Furnishings with which the dead were to be cremated were carefully destroyed before placing them on the funeral pyre. Nearly 60% of the discovered artefacts bear traces of cutting, bending or breaking. Another 30% are lumps of melted bronze, in which no traces survived. What was found whole were only small elements that were integral parts of larger artefacts: fittings, some small bells, a glass bead, two pendants made from bronze sheet or U-shaped fittings, and binocular-like pendants. The only kind of finds that does not conform to this pattern is completely preserved ringlets. Among the destroyed artefacts

there are also very tiny fragments that are smaller than one centimetre. The analysis of necklace fragmentation implies that a large group is formed by parts that are smaller than two centimetres. This demonstrates the considerable commitment of people destroying these artefacts.

The vast majority of finds from Mosiężysko have numerous analogies in the Czarna Hańcza Group. What is more, it is possible to suggest some artefacts that are typical of the material culture of the area. What can be mentioned here are *Totenkrone*-type necklaces, pendants made from bronze sheets, crosslets with enamel, and iron pendants. It is very probable that penannular brooches with zoomorphic (included those bent away), thickening and cylindrical terminals also belong to artefacts that are characteristic of the Czarna Hańcza Group. These are dress parts of an interregional nature; however, the frequency of their occurrence at Mosiężysko is the same as in the entire Czarna Hańcza Group. The same can be said of small bells that are close to Type 5 after Rainio;¹⁴ such belts are the most numerous in sites of the Czarna Hańcza Group.

The pottery sherds that were discovered at the site are very poorly preserved. A total of 94% of these fit within a 2×2-centimetre square, and the average weight of one fragment is 1.83 grams. All bear traces of erosion. A peculiarity of the assemblage discussed is the relatively high number of fragments with visible traces of secondary contact with high temperatures. Such traces were noted on 12% of the sherds that were evenly distributed in the trench, and in the cluster of finds that were acquired in the course of

13 L. Jończyk, K. Żołądziowski, Elite burden. Totenkrone type necklaces from the “Mosiężysko” cemetery in Szurpiły, *Światowit* LX, 2022.

14 R. Rainio, Classifying Iron Age Bells, Pellet Bells and Bell Pendants, *Studien zur Musikarchäologie. VI, Herausforderungen und Ziele der Musikarchäologie Vorträge des 5. Symposiums der Internationalen Studiengruppe Musikarchäologie im Ethnologischen Museum der Staatlichen Museen zu Berlin, 19.–23. September 2006*, ed. A. A. Both et al., Leidorf, 2008, pp. 513–14.

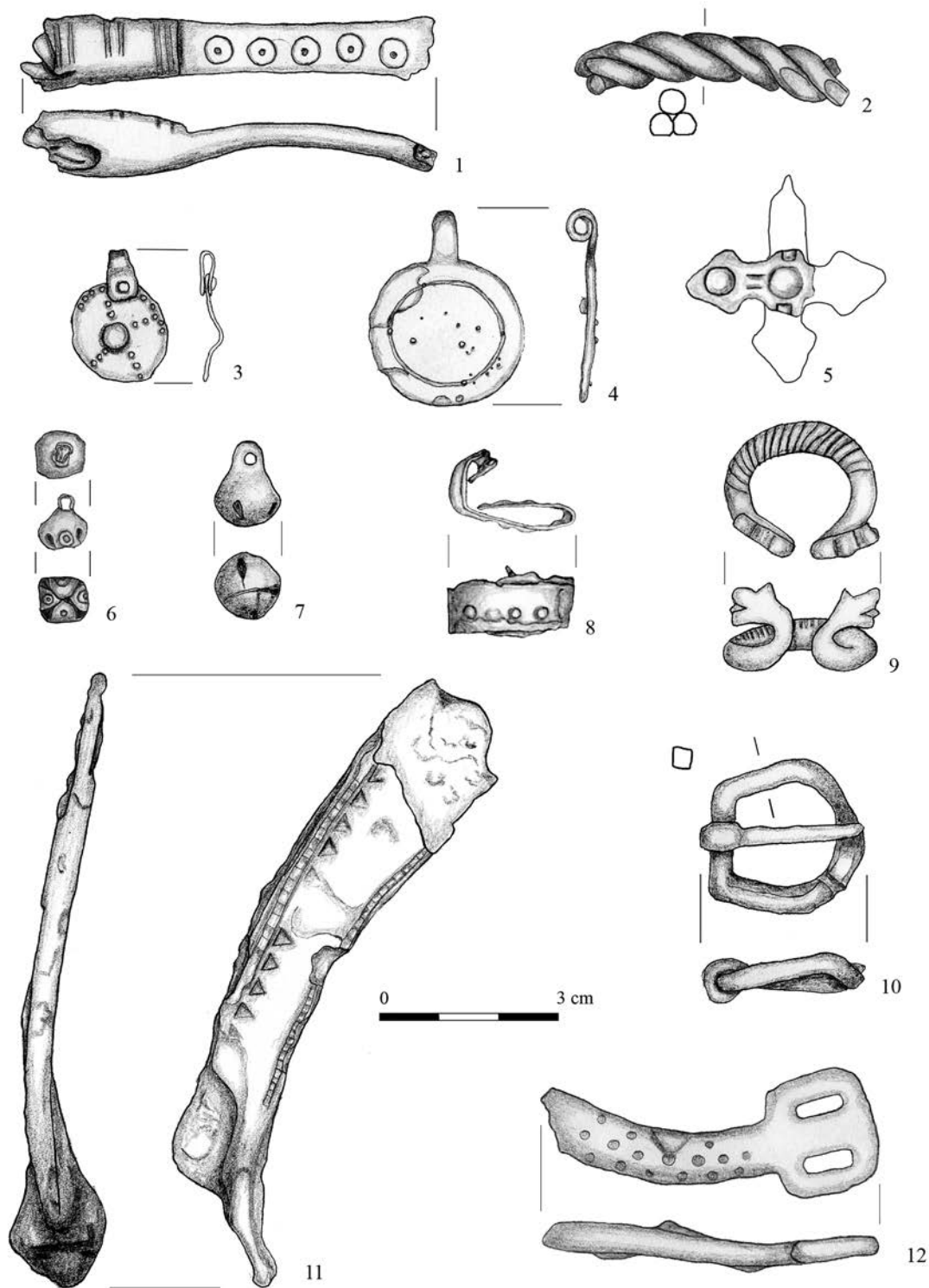


Fig. 6. A selection of finds from the Mosiężysko cemetery: 1 – the terminal of a Totenkrone-type necklace; 2 – a fragment of the band of a Totenkrone-type necklace; 3–4 pendants; 5 – a fragment of a crosslet with enamel; 6–7 – bells; 8 – a ringlet; 9 – a penannular brooch with zoomorphic terminals; 10 – a buckle; 11 – a fragment of a stirrup; 12 – a fragment of a spur; 1–3, 5–9 copper alloy; 4, 10–12 iron. Drawing by L. Jończyk.

surveys. Archaeometric analyses were carried out on 20 fragments.¹⁵ The examinations included, among others, a chemical analysis of a white-grey substance that was noticed on the surface of about 500 pottery fragments (8% of the assemblage). It was found that the substance originated as the result of a long-lasting deposition of pottery sherds in ash from burnt bones and plants. A KH analysis was carried out in order to identify the highest temperature with which ten samples were in contact. Its results demonstrate that all these remained in an environment with a temperature of 900° to 1000°C. It is significant that the same results were obtained both for samples on which there were macroscopic traces of low and medium-intensity secondary burning, as well as for samples with no such traces. These results, combined with a pottery firing temperature that was assessed at 600° to 700°C, or slightly more, but not exceeding 900°C,¹⁶ allow us to say that all the examined samples were on the funeral pyre. The fact that on only some of these fragments there were macroscopically visible traces of cremation rites results from the physicochemical properties of individual vessels. This leads to the conclusion that in all probability all the pottery material that was acquired at the site should be considered sherds of vessels that were part of furnishings of the dead. Such an interpretation receives additional support from the absence of any traces of food crusts on these sherds. An interpretation of these fragments as the remains of possible funeral rites is less likely. What is more, the data obtained as a result of KH analysis is the most accurate piece of information on the temperatures in which the dead from Mosiężysko were cremated.

It is possible to suggest some directions of inter-regional connections for the finds from Mosiężysko. The highest number of analysed categories of artefact had analogies in Courland. This applies both to all-Balt finds (such as small bells and the majority of penannular brooches), as well as to those whose range of occurrence is limited (such as round and rhombic pendants, a lyre-shaped buckle, small springs, and a spearhead). Sambian material culture is close to that of Courland, which is why analogies with finds from Mosiężysko can also be found in Sambian materials. Apart from artefacts that were characteristic of nearly all the Balts, and those which were also typical of the Curonians (lyre-shaped buckles and spearheads), special connections with Sambia are implied by stirrups and fragments of bronze bowl tripods/cauldrons (in German *Grapen*). Yet another clearly visible direction is Podlachia, where all types of analogous pendants, made from bronze sheets, ringlets and band-shaped bracelets with terminals bent into loops, can be found. What is less pronounced are connections with Semigallia (crosslets with enamel and rhombic pendants), the eastern zone of the Balt and the Slavic lands (a bracelet with a terminal bent into a loop), or Western Europe (bronze bowl tripods/cauldrons, spur fasteners).

The peculiar site at Obeliai (Ukmergė district) should be mentioned here. This is a cemetery that is situated in the borderland between two cultural zones: that of flat cemeteries which are characteristic of central Lithuania and East Lithuanian Barrow Culture. Analogies from Obeliai were pointed out in as many as 22 categories of find from Mosiężysko.¹⁷

- 15 M. Daszkiewicz, L. Jończyk, Pottery from a Medieval Cemetery in Szurpiły, NE Poland: Results of a Pilot Study, *Metalla Sonderheft*, 2021, pp. 49–51; L. Jończyk, M. Daszkiewicz, Ceramika ze stan. 8 w Szurpiłach (Mosiężysko) w świetle wyników badań archeometrycznych, *Ceramika wczesnośredniowieczna w Polsce – stan i potrzeby badań*, ed. M. Dworaczyk, B. Gruszka, A. Janowski, forthcoming.
- 16 A. Buko, *Ceramika wczesnopolska. Wprowadzenie do badań*, Wrocław–Warszawa–Kraków–Gdańsk–Łódź, 1990, pp. 149–50; M. Daszkiewicz, L. Maritan, Experimental Firing and Re-Firing, *The Oxford Handbook of Archaeological Ceramic Analysis*, ed. A. M. W. Hunt, Oxford, 2017, pp. 497–500.
- 17 L. Jończyk, Mosiężysko. Wczesnośredniowieczne stanowisko w Szurpiłach, woj. podlaskie. Źródła, analizy, interpretacje, PhD dissertation, Uniwersytet Warszawski, 2022, pp. 65–118.

The similarity in material cultures from both sites is even more intriguing due to the fact that Vytautas Urbanavičius, who authored the research at Obeliai, says that the finds from this cemetery differ from the typical furnishings of Lithuanian necropolis, and are most similar to Pruthenian artefacts.¹⁸

Chronology

The analysis of the finds from Mosiężysko demonstrated that the majority of types that were discovered in the cemetery are artefacts of a broad chronology encompassing the entire Early Middle Ages. Only for some artefacts was it possible to narrow down their dating. Most artefacts whose chronology can be identified in a more precise manner fit within the period from the 12th to the 13th century. The 13th century is a period when, at least in theory, nearly all the artefacts in question may have been in use simultaneously. These results were confirmed by radiocarbon examinations of five bone samples.

Burial rites

The data obtained in the course of the archaeological research at Mosiężysko suggests that the stones in the cobbling were arranged in a desired manner. These interferences, however, were not considerable, and many stones remained in their natural arrangement in the undisturbed subsoil. Vestiges of the cremation ceremony, such as remains of the funeral pyre with burnt bones and furnishings, were deposited on the previously prepared substratum. The interpretation

that the remains of the dead and of burnt artefacts were picked from the pyre and then brought to the burial ground must be rejected. It is contradicted by numerous finds of very tiny artefacts, merely a few millimetres in size. It was impossible to intentionally pick them out of the pyre. Although such a possibility can be assumed in the case of bones that were white, and as such could be clearly seen against the background of burning, it is completely improbable in the case of dark lumps of melted bronze.¹⁹ Yet another premise that confirms this assumption is the fact that on the surfaces and fractures of some pottery shards there was a substance that originated as the result of the long-lasting deposition of these shards in ash.

The archaeological features recorded are relics of burning and ash deposited on the surface of the site. The fillings of these features were in most cases composed of grey-dark brown soil mixed with humus, in a few cases with inclusions of burning. The shapes and sizes of these features demonstrate that in no case can they be interpreted as intentional pits that were usually dug in cemeteries for the purpose of burial deposition. These features are rather remains and washouts of the burning layer bottom, with the bones and furnishings it contained. This interpretation explains the irregularity of isolated features, their exceptionally low thickness, and the lack of a visible correlation between the feature size and the number and kinds of furnishings, as well as between features and clusters of finds of all kinds. The cremation layer in all probability originated gradually on the surface of the entire cemetery, and the results of subsequent cremations extended its size. These were not necessarily large. Experiments have demonstrated that the amount of remains from one funeral pyre is

18 V. V. Urbanavičius, *Pogrebeniâ v ozere Obelâi', Issledovaniâ v oblasti Balto-Slavânskoj duhovnoj kul'tury. pogrebal'nij obrâd*, ed. V. V. Ivanov, L. G. Nevskaâ, Moskva, 1990, p. 200.

19 H. Zoll-Adamikowa, *Wczesnośredniowieczne cmentarzyska ciałopalne Słowian na terenie Polski. Cz. II. Analiza. Wnioski*, p. 64; M. Becker et al., *Nach dem großen Brand. Verbrennung auf dem Scheiterhaufen – ein interdisziplinärer Ansatz, Bericht der Römisch-Germanischen Kommission* 86, 2005, pp. 105–6, 118, Fig. 15.

rather modest.²⁰ An important question is why only such insignificant vestiges of this layer survived. The saturation of the humus with burnt bones and finds implies that it is in all probability a partial product of processes taking place in the cremation layer. From a pedological point of view, it is possible that the remains of funeral pyres considerably enriched the soil and eventually transformed into humus. A period of about 700 years between the time of use of the burial ground and the present day seems to be enough for such a transformation to take place.

Yet another important issue concerns the place where the very cremation process was carried out. This cannot be determined with absolute certainty; however, there are premises to claim that the act of cremation took place locally. As is demonstrated above, the cremation layer that was recorded at the examined site remained there in a complete state of preservation. Numerous very small artefacts suggest that we are dealing with entire remains of the funeral pyre, and not only with a selected part of it. It is possible that such remains were carefully gathered and then brought to the burial ground from another place. However, the former interpretation receives support from the fact that some stones in the undisturbed subsoil that were recorded in the trench were crumbled as a result of contact with high temperatures. What is more, there was discolouration in the undisturbed subsoil. This may also have originated as a result of burning. It is difficult to reconstruct exactly how cremation remains were distributed on the

surface of the cemetery. It is possible that they were left to their fate in the place of cremation. Sometimes individual small stones were placed on them, which is demonstrated by stones remaining in the entire humus layer, and by those discovered at the tops of the recorded features.

Analogous burial rites

Szurpiły was a large micro-region that was used intensively for about 400 years. So far, two sepulchral sites have been discovered there: the discussed cemetery, and the grave on the slope of Castle Hill that was found and examined at the same time.²¹ A common trait of both sites is the cremation burial rite, and the fact that the remains of one dead are scattered. A total of 16 cemeteries have been discovered so far within the entire Czarna Hańcza Group. The vast majority of these are sites that were examined in the 19th and the early 20th century.²² Already at the fieldwork stage, relatively few pieces of information were obtained for them (from the point of view of present-day research methods). What is more, part of this information was lost in the later period. On the other hand, it is possible to point out convergent traits. The sites in question are flat cremation cemeteries, and the forms of graves vary. At sites that are better preserved and which were examined contemporarily, there were very shallow small pit graves and broad shallow pits, in which it is possible

20 M. Becker et al., Nach dem großen Brand. Verbrennung auf dem Scheiterhaufen – ein interdisziplinärer Ansatz, Fig. 9, 12.

21 M. Engel, C. Sobczak, W poszukiwaniu nekropoli Átvâgov. Uwagi na temat znalezisk sepulkralnych z okresu wikińskiego w Szurpiłach, *Barbaricum* 11, 2015, pp.131–58.

22 J. Basanavičius, Autobiografija. Mano gyvenimo kronika ir nervų ligos istorija 1851–1922, *Lietuvių Tauta* V, 1936:8, pp. 123–24; K. Käs wurm, Alte Schlossberge und andere Ueberreste von Bauwerken aus der Vorzeit im Pregelgebiete Litauens, *Schriften der Physikalisch-Ökonomischen Gesellschaft zu Königsberg in Pr.* 14, 1873, pp. 77–78; O. Tischler, Bericht über die praehistorisch-anthropologischen Arbeiten der Physikalisch-Oekonomischen Gesellschaft, *Schriften der Physikalisch-Ökonomischen Gesellschaft zu Königsberg in Pr.* 18, 1877, pp. 276–78; G. Bujack, Sitzungsbericht der Altertumsgesellschaft Prussia', *Altpreußische Monatschrift* 14, 1877, p. 648; E. Hollack, *Erläuterungen zur vorgeschichtlichen Übersichtskarte von Ostpreußen*, Berlin-Glogau, 1908, p. 24; E. Hollack, Die Grabformen ostpreussischer Gräberfelder, *Zeitschrift für Ethnologie* 40, 1908, pp. 181–82; C. Engel, Zwei spätheidnische Silberfunde aus altsudausischen Gebiet, *Prussia* 29, 1931, pp. 68–78; Engel, la Baume, *Kulturen und Völker*, p. 274; C. Engel, Das jüngste heidnische Zeitalter in Masuren, *Prussia* 33, 1939, p. 53.

to notice clusters of burnt bones and furnishings.²³ At the same time, there are both cremated remains and finds that are chaotically scattered among clusters at these sites. Traces of burning were recorded at Krukówek (Suwałki district), at sites in the vicinity of Pijawne Polskie (Augustów district) and at Skomętno (Ełk district). Only vestigial traces of burning were revealed at Mosiężysko, and they are strikingly disproportionate to the number of portable finds. At sites that survived in a worse condition, there are only large concentrations of archaeological material which is chaotically scattered within the site space in the surface layer.²⁴ As the human remains and furnishings were extremely shallow, and perhaps even deposited on the surface, the archaeological context is especially prone to destruction in this case. Even small-scale ploughing (not necessarily with the use of a tractor), or tree roots, can almost completely obliterate traces of grave pits. No traces of pits were observed at Mosiężysko, but the presence of find clusters was noted. Burials at both sites at Szurpiły were accompanied by stone structures, such as cobblings, a wreath and less regular stone clusters. What is more, a stone wreath was also found at Ożkabalai (Vilkaiviškis district), cobblings were recorded at Żytkiejmy (Gołdap district), an unspecified stone cluster was found at Degucie (Gołdap district), and a burial at

Skomętno was covered with a stone. As regards many sites, especially those that were discovered before the mid-19th century, there is no information available on this issue. On the other hand, sites that have recently been examined are diversified with regard to that: namely, no stone arrangements or traces of them were discovered at Burdyniszki (Suwałki district), Niemcowizna (Suwałki district) or Krukówek. Yet another common trait is the manner of treatment of artefacts that were deposited in graves. Apart from finds that are relatively well preserved, there are artefacts that were intentionally destroyed (cut, bent or broken). Many of these bear traces of secondary contact with high temperatures, that is, they went through a funeral pyre.

Cemeteries with burial rites that were most similar to those recorded at Mosiężysko occur in the Early Middle Ages in west Estonia and in Finland.²⁵ These are multiple burials, located on small hills that were often left uncultivated due to the presence of stones. The most widespread type of necropolis are stone cemeteries that existed in the period between the fifth and the 13th centuries. These are densely placed cobblings of various shapes, composed of one or a few layers. Their shapes are usually irregular in plan, or circular. Between, above and under the stones there are scattered human bones belonging

23 M. Engel, J. Siemaszko, Jaćwieskie cmentarzysko ciałopalne w Krukówku, pow. suwalski. Okoliczności odkrycia i opis znalezisk, *Studia Archaeologica Sudaica* II, 2019, pp. 299–309; M. Engel, “Kraina konnych wojowników?” Przegląd uzbrojenia i oporządzenia jeździeckiego na terenach jaćwieskich od schyłku IX do XIII w., *Acta Militaria Mediaevalia* XVI, 2020, pp. 59–62.

24 W. Nowakowski, Jaćwieskie cmentarzysko, pp. 119–23; L. Jończyk, Niemcowizna, st. 1, woj. podlaskie. Badania w roku 2011, *Światowit* IX (L)/B, 2012, pp. 319–322; M. Žemantauskaitė, O. Fedajevs, Žvalgymai Cigoniškiuose, *Archeologiniai tyrinėjimai Lietuvoje 2017 m.*, 2018, pp. 591–97.

25 A. Wickholm, Cremation Cemeteries under Flat Ground – a Representative of What?, *Interpretierte Eisenzeiten. Fallstudien, Methoden, Theorie. Tagungsbericht der 1. inzer Gespräche zur Interpretativen Eisenzeitarchäologie*, ed. R. Karl, J. Leskovar, Linz, 2005, pp. 32–33, 35; M. Mandel, *Maidla. Muinaskalmistu saladused*, Tallinn, 2017; J. Selirand, *Eestlaste matmiskombed varafeodaalsete suhetre tärkamise perioodil (11.–13. sajand)*, Tallinn, 1974, pp. 236–240; P. Uino, *Ancient Karelia. Archaeological Studies*; J. Karvonen, Deliberately Damaged Objects in Iron Age Cremation Cemeteries, *Fennoscandia Archaeologica* XV, 1998, pp. 4, 9; P. Purhonen, ed., *Vainionmäki – a Merovingian Period Cemetery in Laitila, Finland*, Helsinki, 1996; A. Wickholm, Reuse in Finnish Cremation Cemeteries under Level Ground – Examples of Collective Memory, *The Materiality of Death: Bodies, Burials, Beliefs*, ed. F. Fahlander, T. Oestigaard, Oxford, 2008, pp. 90–91; A. Tvaari, *The Migration Period, Pre-Viking Age, and Viking Age in Estonia*, Tartu, 2012, pp. 258–261; R. Allmäe, Observations on Estonian Iron Age Cremations, *Archaeologia Baltica* 19, 2013, pp. 31–47; M. Mägi, Late Prehistoric Societies and Burials in the Eastern Baltic, *Archaeologia Baltica* 19, 2013, p. 184; A. Wessman, H. Williams, Building for the Cremated Dead Ephemeral and Cumulative Constructions, *Cremation and the Archaeology of Death*, ed. J. I. Cerezo-Román, A. Wessman, H. Williams, Oxford, 2017, pp. 189–195.

to about a dozen people, as well as furnishings. It is possible to isolate find clusters, but between them there are also loosely dispersed remains of the dead and their grave goods. In some cases, it is possible to identify individual men's burials with weaponry, usually between the mid-sixth and mid-eighth centuries. It is noteworthy that the number of burnt bones is usually low, and it is clearly less than what can be expected on the basis of the amount of furnishings. Cremation remains were sometimes placed in cavities dug into the stone layer. Available raw materials, such as granite in Finland and sandstone in Estonia, were used for construction purposes. In southwest Finland there are cemeteries of this type with no stone structures. Artefacts and burnt bones in these cemeteries were deposited in the layer of burning and in ash of various thicknesses, directly under the sod. Similar cemeteries with no stone structures have also recently been discovered in Estonia. Some Estonian researchers believe that cremations were carried out in situ, while Finnish archaeologists believe that they were done elsewhere. Furnishings include ornaments, dress parts, tools, weaponry and equestrian equipment, as well as numerous pottery sherds. A high share of furnishings bears traces of intentional destruction and secondary burning; however, intact artefacts are also found. Fragments of the same find are sometimes found at a distance of up to a dozen metres from each other. This implies that remains of one and the same dead may have been treated in a similar manner. This, however, cannot be verified.

The Finnish and Estonian cemeteries with dispersed burials show the most common features of burial rites with those recorded at Mosiężysko. However, it is difficult at this stage of the research to explain the reason for these similarities.

Burial rites that in some respects are similar to those at Mosiężysko were recorded in other Balt lands, including Pruthenian lands. Their common trait is the collective nature of burials. An excellent summation of the present-day state of research on this kind of burial in the Balt lands was offered by Mindaugas Bertašius.²⁶ In Sambian cemeteries there are peculiar multiple graves called *Aschenplatz*. There is a term in literature 'Aschenplatz-type' cemeteries. On the other hand, due to the fact that *Aschenplätze* can be found in cemeteries where other burial rites were also in use in the Early Middle Ages, the term 'Aschenplatz-type features' is more correct. This term has never been defined precisely, and all we have are individual mentions that discuss some traits of such places that were examined in the 19th and in the first half of the 20th centuries.²⁷ The term was used for multiple burials containing impressive numbers of furnishings, first of all weaponry and equestrian equipment.²⁸ Similar features are also discovered in the course of present-day research on the Sambian Peninsula.²⁹ Sambian *Aschenplätze* are the most commonly known Pruthenian graves with multiple burials. It is very probable that similar features also occurred in the vicinity of Elbląg³⁰ and on the Lower Nemunas,³¹ although the data we have in this case

26 M. Bertašius, *Vidurio Lietuva VIII–XII a.*, Kaunas, 2002, pp. 80–96.

27 W. Wróblewski, *Aschenplätze – the Forgotten Burial Rituals of the Old Prussians*.

28 O. Tischler, Über den Zuwachs der archäologischen Sammlung des Provinzial-Museums im Jahre 1888, *Schriften der Physikalisch-Ökonomischen Gesellschaft zu Königsberg in Pr.* XXX, 1890, p. 31.

29 V. I. Kulakov, *Prussy эпохи Викингов: жизнь и быт обшны Kaupa*, Moskva, 2016, pp. 56–59; V. I. Kulakov, Zol'nik na Gore Velikanov, *Res Humanitariae* 27, 2020, pp. 228–235.

30 R. Panfil, Dæt is mid Estum þeaw þæt þær sceal ælces geðeodes man beon forbærned. Co właściwie powiedział Wulfstan o paleniu zmarłych przez Estów we fragmencie swojego sprawozdania z podróży do Truso?, *Komunikaty Mazursko-Warmińskie* 4 (290), 2015, p. 576; R. Dorr, Das vorgeschichtliche Gräberfeld von Benkenstein-Freiwalde, Kr. Elbing (700–1150 n.Chr.), *Mitteilungen des Copernicus Vereins für Wissenschaft und Kunst zu Thorn* 22, 1914, p. 3–4, 11, Pl. IV:1–3.

31 N. Goßler, Ch. Jahn, *Wikinger und Balten an der Memel. Die Ausgrabungen des frühgeschichtlichen Gräberfeldes von Linkuhnen in Ostpreußen 1928–1939*, Mainz, 2019, p. 87.

is also scarce. Slightly more is known on the use of analogous burial rites in Courland. In local cemeteries there are vast pits/burning layers, with loosely dispersed burnt human bones with rich furnishings. These furnishings are discovered in clusters, or are chaotically scattered.³² Similar features were also found in cemeteries in central Lithuania.³³

So far in Lithuania there have been few discoveries of cemeteries where only multiple burials were found. These burials were putatively layered ones, and they contained common furnishings such as small dress parts, ornaments and tools. What is meant here are the sites at Bajorai (Elektrėnai district), Meškučiai (Kaišiadorys district) and Žeronys (Trakai district), where the remains of dead of different sexes and ages were deposited over a long period.³⁴ A peculiar trait of these funeral rites are burials that were deposited in water.³⁵ Such burials have not so far been found

at Szurpiły, in spite of searches. Yet another type is offered by a multiple burial that was discovered in a household in the stronghold of Szestno-Czarny Las.³⁶

In Sambia, on the southwest border of the Pruthenian settlement area, on the Lower Nemunas, in Courland, and in central and eastern Lithuania, the multiple graves recorded were not the only form of burial. Concerning Sambia, it is difficult to determine a quantitative share of individual grave types. It is very possible, however, that *Aschenplatz*-type multiple burials are numerous, although not dominant. In other areas these were single features that differed from general standards. At the same sites where vast and shallow *Aschenplatz*-type burials were recorded, there was also a quantitative preponderance of individual cremation and inhumation burials that were closer to the classic kind. The forms of these burials varied. What is more, near such sites there

- 32 O. Tischler, Über den Zuwachs der archäologischen Sammlung des Provinzial-Museums im Jahre 1888, pp. 28–29; A. Varnas, Griežės Kapinynas, *Archeologiniai Tyrinėjimai Lietuvoje 1980–1981 m.*, 1982, pp. 75–78; A. Varnas, Griežės Plokštėnės Kapinynas, *Archeologiniai Tyrinėjimai Lietuvoje 1982–1983 m.*, 1984, pp. 108–111; V. Žulkus, Tikėjimų kaita pagoniškuose Baltuose. Kuršiai, *Sociologija. Mintis ir veiksmas* 7, 2001, p. 14; V. Žulkus, Izmeneniā v mirovovzrenii Kuršej v rannem srednevekov'e, *Vostočnā Evropa v srednevekov'e. K 80-letiu Valentina Vasil'eviča Sedova*, ed. N. A. Makarov, A. V. Černecov, N. V. Lopatin, Moskva, 2004, p. 159; A. Bliujienė, Ugnies galia: mirusiųjų deginimo papročių įvairovė, *Klaipėdos (Memel) Kraštas: nuo ištakų iki XVII amžiaus*, ed. A. Bliujienė, Klaipėda, 2018, p. 108.
- 33 M. Bertašius, *Vidurio Lietuva VIII–XII a.*, pp. 80–89; G. Petrauskas, Mirusiųjų deginimo paprotys viduramžių Lietuvoje: kompleksinis požiūris į XIII–XIV a. degintinius kapinytus, p. 178.
- 34 V. Vaitkevičius, J. Žikulinas, Archeologijos ir mitologijos objektų žvalgymai, *Archeologiniai Tyrinėjimai Lietuvoje 2008 m.*, 2009, pp. 504–505; G. Petrauskas, Prie Lietuvos valstybės susidarymo klausimu sugrįžtant: laidojimo papročių aspektas, *Res Humanitariae* XIII, 2015, p. 119; G. Petrauskas, Meškučių Kapinynas, *Archeologiniai Tyrinėjimai Lietuvoje 2014 m.*, 2015, pp. 151–58; G. Petrauskas, Meškučių Kapinynas, *Archeologiniai Tyrinėjimai Lietuvoje 2015 m.*, 2016, pp. 168–72; G. Petrauskas, Mirusiųjų deginimo paprotys viduramžių Lietuvoje: kompleksinis požiūris į XIII–XIV a. degintinius kapinytus, p. 179; V. Vaitkevičius, Bajorų kapinynas, *Archeologiniai Tyrinėjimai Lietuvoje 2016 m.*, 2017, pp. 137–140.
- 35 G. Petrauskas, Mirusiųjų deginimo paprotys viduramžių Lietuvoje: kompleksinis požiūris į XIII–XIV a. degintinius kapinytus, p. 179, 191; R. Vengalis, Semeniškių kapinynas, *Archeologiniai Tyrinėjimai Lietuvoje 2010 metais*, 2011, pp. 124–27; V. Urbanavičius, S. Urbanavičienė, Archeologiniai tyrimai, *Lietuvos Archeologija* 6, 1988, pp. 35–48; G. Petrauskas, Prie Lietuvos valstybės susidarymo klausimu sugrįžtant: laidojimo papročių aspektas, p. 120; M. Bertašius, *Vidurio Lietuva VIII–XII a.*, p. 88; E. Šturms, Wilkumuižas ezera atradumi, *Senatne un Māksla* II, 1936, pp. 72–86.
- 36 W. Wróblewski, Ossa cremata. Obrządek pogrzbewy Galindów we wczesnym średniowieczu w świetle znalezisk na grodzisku w Szestnie – Czarnym Lesie; A. Kalinowska, Bruki z Szestna-Czarnego Lasu jako relikty organizacji przestrzennej majdanu wczesnośredniowiecznego grodziska pruskiego, MA thesis, Uniwersytet Warszawski, 2006, pp. 68, 73, Pl. III.3; M. Sabaciński, Bałtyjski kult głów (?) na podstawie materiału z grodziska w Szestnie “Czarnym Lesie”, *Archeologia Polski* L, no. 1–2, 2005, pp. 81–101.

are contemporaneous cemeteries with no multiple burials.³⁷ A common trait of these features is the fact that they are shallow multiple graves in vast pits. However, they differ with regard to their size, thickness, the presence of burning, furnishings, and the number of dead buried. Audronė Bliujienė has expressed doubts regarding the assessment of Curonian features as identical to Sambian *Aschenplatz*-type burials.³⁸ This issue requires further study. What is especially problematic is the fact of the presence of relative large features in cemeteries. Such features are about two or three by one or two metres in size, but they merely contain the remains of one or two individuals. These features are not *Aschenplatz*-type, but they also differ from standard cremation burials.

The aforementioned differences in burial rites that were recorded in the Pruthenian lands and in the neighbouring regions certainly call for an in-depth analysis, which should define individual burial types and discuss their distribution, both in time and space.

Between paganism and Christianity

Regrettably, the research at Mosiężysko has not provided much information on the rites that accompanied burials. It can be assumed that the cremation process itself was carried out in a similar way to other cases.³⁹ It is only known that before the cremation,

the entire furnishings of the dead were carefully destroyed. They were then burnt together with the dead body.

There is one category of artefact that differs from the surviving ones with regard to the state of preservation and distribution. These are knives. As opposed to other finds, the majority of knives do not bear traces of secondary contact with high temperatures. Out of 40 artefacts, only nine are covered with a fire patina. What is more, not all of them were intentionally destroyed before cremation. Half of these finds are small fragments less than four centimetres in length, and it is only in this group that patina-covered artefacts occur. The other half are considerably larger parts, and in a few cases entire or almost entire artefacts survived. On the basis of the available material, it is impossible to determine which of the discovered knives and fragments of them were accidentally lost, and which ones belonged to the furnishings of the dead. What is more, knives are one of very few find categories (and even the only category where we are dealing with a rule and not with a statistical error) which do not occur in the find clusters recorded in the trench. The latter remark also concerns nine small knife fragments that were covered with a fire patina. The non-burnt fragments were deposited in slightly higher numbers on the eastern edge of the cemetery, that is, in the direction of the settlement.

37 A. Bezenberger, F. Peiser, Gräberfeld bei Bludau, Kr. Fischhausen, *Prussia* 23, no. I, 1914, pp. 210–49; E. la Baume, *Kulturen und Völker der Frühzeit im Preußenlande*, p. 192; Engel, *Das jüngste heidnische Zeitalter in Masuren*, pp. 42–43; U. Kobylińska, Z. Kobyliński, D. Wach, *Wczesnośredniowieczne cmentarzysko pruskie w Dobrzykach*, St. XXVIII, gmina Zalewo, województwo warmińsko-mazurskie, *Warmińsko-Mazurski Biuletyn Konserwatorski* II, 2000, pp. 12–76; M. Bertašius, *Vidurio Lietuva VIII–XII a.*, pp. 67–129; E. Gintautaitė–Butėnienė, E. Butėnas, Laivių kapinynas, *Lietuvos Archeologija* 22, 2002, pp. 9–198; V. Žulkus, *Izmeneniā v mirovozzrenii Kuršej v rannem srednevekov'e*; G.N. Pronin et al., *Mogil'nik Povarovka X–XIII vv. (Kaliningradskaa oblast)*, Moskva, 2006, pp. 332–33; E. Gričiuvienė, *Kuršiai. Genties kultūra laidosenos duomenimis. Baltų archeologijos paroda. Katalogas*, Vilnius, 2009, pp. 229–30; V. I. Kulakov, *Prussy epochi Vikingov: žizn' i byt obšiny Kaupa*; G. Petrauskas, *Mirusiųjų deginimo paprotys viduramžių Lietuvoje: kompleksinis požiūris į XIII–XIV a. degintinius kapinykus*; A. Bliujienė, *Ugnies galia: mirusiųjų deginimo papročių įvairovė*, pp. 109–12; Gošler, Jahn, *Wikinger und Balten an der Memel. Die Ausgrabungen des frühgeschichtlichen Gräberfeldes von Linkuhnen in Ostpreußen 1928–1939*; R. Shiroukhov, K. Skvorcov, T. Ibsen, *The Early Medieval Graves of Groß Ottenhagen (Berezovka). On the Way from Sambia to the Middle Reaches of the Niemen*, *Archaeologia Baltica* 28, 2021, pp. 150–74.

38 A. Bliujienė, *Ugnies galia: mirusiųjų deginimo papročių įvairovė*, p. 108.

39 cf. Becker et al., *Nach dem großen Brand. Verbrennung auf dem Scheiterhaufen – ein interdisziplinärer Ansatz*.

It is possible to attempt to interpret these observations using a passage from the 16th-century chronicle of Maciej Strykowski, which discusses the apotropaic rites that accompanied the transport of the dead body of a Sambian⁴⁰ woman to a cemetery: *‘Przyjaciele wszyscy idąc processią, szermując nożami wzdórę, wielkim głosem wołając: Gejgej, begejte Pokkole! to jest: uciekajcie, uciekajcie, biegnajcie precz od tego ciała, wy djabli!’*⁴¹ (All the friends go in a procession, brandish their knives high, and shout loudly: *Gejgej, begejte Pokkole!* That is: run away, run away from this body, you devils!). Paweł Kawiński analysed this narrative and remarked that also ‘In Lithuania it was believed that only a knife stab could kill or wound the air demons that were personified by gales.’ It is possible that some of the knives that were discovered at Mosiężysko are vestiges of protective rites which were similar to those mentioned by Maciej Strykowski. This issue, however, certainly calls for further research.

It seems that a similar phenomenon has been observed in the cemeteries of Saaremaa, which have a similar burial rite as described in this paper. Spearheads, javelin heads, knives and other sharp instruments, many of them without traces of being in fire, have often been found there in the area between

burials, away from other finds. They also demarcated the borders of the burial site in many cemeteries. Marika Mägi, who described this custom, believes that the sharp instruments were put in the edges of the grave to prevent the dead from returning to the living, or to keep him/her from dark forces.⁴²

All that is known so far about the burial rites of the inhabitants of Szurpiły in the 13th century testifies to the use of pre-Christian funeral rites. On the other hand, it is known that the studied community had contact with Christianity, or at least with its symbolism. It is known from written sources that the inhabitants of the Czarna Hańcza Group were the aim of Catholic Christianisation missions (which were effective, in the opinion of the author of the source) at least from the mid-13th century, not to mention the mission of Bruno of Querfurt in the early 11th century.⁴³ Tangible proof of these contacts are crosslet-shaped pendants, usually in the shape of crosslets ornamented with enamel. Such pendants can be abundantly found both at Szurpiły (Fig. 6:5) and in the remaining sites of the Czarna Hańcza Group. The origin of these artefacts is believed to be related to the influence of the Eastern Church.⁴⁴ The issue of crosslets as Christian symbols that are discovered in graves in cemeteries with non-Christian burial rites

40 In this passage the chronicler discusses habits of contemporaneous inhabitants of Sambia, which he also calls Sudovia (this term was used for the Yotvingia in German), although he believes that local inhabitants are Samogitians. As after the conquest of Yotvingia in the end of the 13th c. some inhabitants of this land moved to Sambia, some descriptions of early modern period habits of inhabitants of Sambia are believed to be related to Yotvingians/Sudovians. However, the discussed passage in Strykowski’s chronicle contains so many notions that it is difficult to unambiguously relate the mentioned description to a specific people.

41 cf. P. Kawiński, *Sacrum w wyobrażeniach pogańskich Prusów. Próba interpretacji na pograniczu historii i etnologii religii*, Olsztyn, 2018, p. 323; N. Vėlius, *Baltų religijos ir mitologijos šaltiniai, II*, Vilnius, 2001, p. 517.

42 M. Mägi, *At the Crossroads of Space and Time. Graves, Changing Society and Ideology on Saaremaa (Ösel), 9th–13th Centuries AD*, Tallinn, 2002, pp. 131–132.

43 K. Górski, *Descriptions Terrarum, Zapiski Historyczne XLVI*, 1981, pp. 7–16; J. Tyszkiewicz, *Najważniejsze problemy historiografii Jaćwieży, Rocznik Białostocki 14*, 1981, p. 83.

44 Ē. Mugurēvičs, *Krustiņveida piekariņi Latvijā laikā no 11. līdz 15. gs., Arheoloģija un Etnogrāfija XI 1974*, p. 252; A. Koperkiewicz, “Dumne Podlasianki, Dumne Mazowszanki” – o naszyjnikach na wczesnośredniowiecznych cmentarzyskach północno-wschodniej Polski, *In silvis, campis...et urbe. Średniowieczny obrządek pogrzebowy na pograniczu polsko-ruskim*, ed. S. Cygan, M. Glinianowski, P. Kotowicz, Rzeszów-Sanok, 2011, p. 281; J. Żółkowska, *Przyczynek do badań nad wczesnośredniowiecznymi zawieszkami z wizerunkami przypisywanymi św. Jerzemu. Znaleziska z obszaru Polski, Materiały i Sprawozdania Rzeszowskiego Ośrodka Archeologicznego XXXVII*, 2016, p. 274; M. Mägi, *In Austrvegr. The Role of the Eastern Baltic in Viking Age Communication across the Baltic Sea*, Leiden–Boston, 2018, p. 400.

has been dealt with many times.⁴⁵ What was debated was the issue whether these crosslets should be interpreted as an expression of the Christian religion of the deceased, or if they were simply one of many ornaments, perhaps of apotropaic significance. In western Finland and in Karelia, where crosslets are usually found in rich men's graves, their presence is explained by practical reasons: it was necessary for a merchant to wear a cross in order to trade with Christians. In these circumstances, crosslet-like pendants can be interpreted as *primum signum*, that is, a state in which a given person declared their willingness for conversion, but was not yet baptised.⁴⁶ However, this explanation is unfounded in the case of Latvian and Scandinavian finds, where crosslets are first of all discovered in women's and children's graves. Crosslets often occurred in assemblages with ornaments (*lunulae*, keys, miniature combs) which were believed to have apotropaic traits, or were simply found as part of necklaces with beads and pendants of other kinds. This is one reason why some researchers tend to assume that crosslets were also amulets. They could also be understood as a religious symbol that was syncretically adopted by followers of non-Christian beliefs.⁴⁷ Eventually, it is necessary to come to terms with the fact that it is impossible to unequivocally answer this question. This is because there are no archaeological criteria that would allow for an unambiguous interpretation of the burial of a Christian.⁴⁸ As regards the finds from Mosiężysko,

it can very probably be supposed that their wearers were aware of their symbolism and their relation to the Christian religion. The cremation burial rite demonstrates that these people did not adopt the religion themselves. However, there is still no answer to the question as to what significance was ascribed to these crosslets by their wearers, and for what reasons they decided to wear these artefacts.

Contacts with the Christian world are also demonstrated by the dynamics of the inflow of imports that can be seen at Szurpiły. In the tenth and 11th centuries, it is possible to notice contacts of inhabitants of the discussed centre with Samia, Semigallia and Courland.⁴⁹ As mentioned above while discussing the finds from Mosiężysko, the same directions were also popular in later times. What is more, traces of contacts with Podlachia occurred. The time of the appearance of finds of West European origin at Szurpiły is of interest. What can be mentioned here are bronze bowl tripods/cauldrons⁵⁰ and parts of fasteners of rowel spurs. Namely, artefacts from the West occurred at Szurpiły at the very end of the existence of this centre. These belong to the latest finds that are dated to the 13th century at the earliest. In the entire material from Szurpiły, there are no obvious West European imports from earlier centuries. On the other hand, it should be stressed that these imports found their way to the Suwałki region quite quickly, almost at the same time that they started to become popular in the territories where

45 Ē. Mugurēvičs, Krustiņveida piekariņi Latvijā laikā no 11. līdz 15. gs., pp. 231–232; P. Uino, *Ancient Karelia. Archaeological Studies*, p. 68; A. Koperkiewicz, "Dumne Podlasianki, Dumne Mazowszanki" – o naszyjnikach na wczesnośredniowiecznych cmentarzyskach północno-wschodniej Polski, pp. 277–78, 281; J. Żółkowska, Przyczynek do badań nad wczesnośredniowiecznymi zawieszkami z wizerunkami przypisywanymi św. Jerzemu. Znaleziska z obszaru Polski, p. 274.

46 P. Uino, *Ancient Karelia. Archaeological Studies*, p. 68.

47 Ē. Mugurēvičs, Krustiņveida piekariņi Latvijā laikā no 11. līdz 15. gs., p. 232; I. Zachrisson, *De samiska metalldepåerna år 1000-1350 i ljuset av fyndet från Mörträsket, Lappland*, Borås, 1984, p. 47.

48 F. Satalecki, *Death as an Architect of Societies. Burial and Social Identity during the Viking Age in South-Western Scania*, PhD thesis, Lunds University, 2014, p. 38.

49 L. Jończyk, A. Gołębiowska-Tobiasz, *Zbrojni kupcy z Szurpił. Na szlaku ze Skandynawii do Bułgarii Nadwożańskiej*, Warszawa, 2021, pp. 86–87.

50 L. Jończyk, K. Żołędziowski, Przyganiał kocioł garnkowi. Fragmenty naczyń ze stopów miedzi z Szurpił, *Studia Archaeologica Sudaica II*, 2019, pp. 263–274.

they originated. This phenomenon can be explained solely with the appearance of the Teutonic Order in the Pruthenian lands. Contacts that can be seen in the material culture do not necessarily translate into a transfer of the symbolic culture. On the other hand, they offer the premise that it may also have come to some exchange of ideas, apart from the exchange of artefacts. Nevertheless, the only category of artefact with univocal Christian connotations, namely crosslets with enamel, is of Eastern origin.

Conclusions

What is the image of the community that inhabited Szurpiły in the 12th and 13th centuries? It should be underlined that a surprisingly low number of places where the remains of the dead were deposited was discovered in this vast area, which was inhabited by a large community for a few centuries, and which has been intensively researched for many decades. This perhaps means that various funeral practices were in use in the case of different groups or social strata. Such a possibility has already been suggested, both with regard to the Balts⁵¹ and the Finno-Ugrians.⁵² The group whose members were buried at Mosiężysko

was composed of members of equal status. Their relations during their life allowed for their earthly remains and accompanying goods to be mixed after their death. In all probability, they were perceived with no fear by the living, as their burials were situated in the immediate vicinity, almost within the settlement. Apart from evidenced contacts with Christians, these people remained faithful to pre-Christian beliefs in terms of eschatology. A basic principle of these beliefs was the observance of cremation as the noblest burial rite. The special significance of cremation for the Pruthenians is also demonstrated by written sources. Some of these (Simon Grunau and Matthäus Prätorius) directly indicate that cremation was the privilege of higher social strata.⁵³

The cemetery at Mosiężysko is the first sepulchral site of the Czarna Hańcza Group that has so far been examined. The conclusions that are drawn on the basis of this research are to be considered tentative, and obviously not decisive. So far, research that is at present being carried out in the cemeteries in Krukówek and on the River Szczeberka has only briefly been reported in literature.⁵⁴ These examinations will certainly expand and verify the image that was given in this paper.

51 P. Kawiński, *Sacrum w wyobrażeniach pogańskich Prusów. Próba interpretacji na pograniczu historii i etnologii religii*, p. 341.

52 M. Mägi, *Late Prehistoric Societies and Burials in the Eastern Baltic*, pp. 184, 186.

53 G. Labuda, ed., *Źródła skandynawskie i anglosaskie do dziejów Słowiańszczyzny*, Warszawa, 1961, p. 86; R. Panfil, *Þæt is mid Estum þeaw þæt þær sceal ælces geðeodes man beon forbærned*. Co właściwie powiedział Wulfstan o paleniu zmarłych przez Estów we fragmencie swojego sprawozdania z podróży do Truso?, pp. 561, 571; N. Vėlius, *Baltų religijos ir mitologijos šaltiniai, I*, Vilnius, 1996, pp. 238–39, 240–41, 245–46, 297–98, 307–8, 360, 369; K. Górski, *Descriptiones Terrarum*, p. 8; Piotr z Dusburga, *Kronika ziemi pruskiej*, ed. J. Wenta, Toruń, 2004, p. 46; N. Vėlius, *Baltų religijos ir mitologijos šaltiniai, II*, Vilnius, 2001, pp. 79, 115–16; N. Vėlius, *Baltų religijos ir mitologijos šaltiniai, III*, Vilnius, 2003, pp. 149, 262.

54 M. Engel, J. Siemaszko, *Jaćwieskie cmentarzysko ciałopalne w Krukówku, pow. suwalski. Okoliczności odkrycia i opis znalezisk*, *Studia Archaeologica Sudaucica II*, 2019, pp. 299–309; I. Lewoc et al., *Jaćwingowie znad Szczeberki. Informacje wstępne*, *Studia Archaeologica Sudaucica III*, (forthcoming). 2021.

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Paskutiniai jotvingių pagonys. Šiaurės rytų Lenkijos Mosięžysko kapinyno atvejis

Ludwika Jończyk

Daugelį metų žinios apie Ankstyvųjų viduramžių senųjų prūsų laidojimo papročius buvo grindžiamos pirmiausia duomenimis, gautais iš Sambijos pusiasalio tyrimų. Ypač keblus klausimas buvo jotvingių laidojimo ritualai. Tačiau 2008–2011 m. žvalgytas Mosięžysko kapinynas yra pirmasis išsamus, siejamas su Ankstyvaisiais viduramžiais jotvingių laidojimo vietos tyrimas naujaisiais laikais. Šis nekropolis iš dalies buvo įkurtas moreniniame grunte (natūralus geologinis darinys) netoli teritorijų, kurios tame pačiame laikotarpyje naudotos ūkinei veiklai.

Kasinėjimų metu kruopščiai ištirtas 156,25 m² plotas. Daugiausia radinių rasta humusiniame sluoksnyje:

apie 3 500 ypačiųjų radinių, beveik 10 000 keramikos šukių ir 6,9 kg degintų žmogaus kaulų. Daugelis artefaktų sąmoningai sugadinti: ant jų matyti antrinio aukštos temperatūros poveikio žymių. Dauguma dirbinių datuojami XII–XIII amžiais.

Pastebėta, kad akmenys moreniniame grunte irgi sukrauti žmonių. Kremavimo apeigų pėdsakai, kaip antai laidojimo laužo liekanos su sudegusiais kaulais ir kapo įrengimo elementais, buvo sukrauti ant iš anksto paruošto pagrindo. Tikėtina, kad ir kremacija vyko toje pačioje vietoje.