

LITHUANIAN INSTITUTE OF HISTORY

FROM PAGANISM TO CHRISTIANITY

BURIAL RITES DURING THE TRANSITION PERIOD

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Lietuvos istorijos institutas
Vilnius, 2024



Research Council of Lithuania

This project has received funding from the Research Council of Lithuania (LMTLT), agreement No S-LIP-24-12

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Bibliographical information about this book/publication is available at the Lithuanian Integrated Library Information System (LIBIS) portal ibiblioteka.lt

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ISBN 978-609-8314-47-2

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The Excavations of the 15th to 17th-Century Punžionys Burial Site in 2017 and 2018

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Punžionys burial site is located in the Švenčionys district about 40 kilometres from Vilnius and five kilometres from where the current Lithuanian-Belarusian border is. There was no site from the 15th to the 18th century known around this place, and no known burial site near this place. The burial site was excavated in 2017 and 2018. It was found accidentally by road workers who were changing the surface of the road by removing the gravel layer. There were 286 graves and at least 67 destroyed graves in the 710-square-metre excavated area. The burial site was used from the beginning of the 15th until the 17th century. This article is the publication of finds from the Punžionys burial site, with context information from this period.

Keywords: Medieval cemetery, burial site, paganism, Christianity, sacrifice.

Foreword

Rescue archaeology is one of the most common types of archaeological excavation in Lithuania. Many small sites sometimes develop into big excavations, which give a lot of archaeological information. One of these is the excavation of the Punžionys burial site. It was found accidentally by road workers who were changing the surface of the road by removing the gravel layer. They noticed parts of human skeletons, and

some iron tools like knives. The Department of Cultural Heritage was informed about the finds, and the work was stopped.

The first part of the excavations took place in late 2017. The size of the site and the preliminary scale of the excavation were obtained in that year. The full-scale excavation of the burial site took place in the summer of 2018.

This place is one of the newest sites from this period in Lithuania, and it was previously unknown. The transitional period from paganism to Christianity is very important in the history of Lithuania, but as one of the last pagan states in Europe, it still had not adopted many written sources. So archaeology is still a very important source of information about the period, not just an additional resource to written sources. New excavations give us more information and an understanding of the times when the whole structure of the community was changing.

The importance of this site is that the excavation was on quite a big scale and on a relatively rare site in the region. This article is the publication of finds at the Punžionys burial site, with context information from this period. Sharing findings with the wider academic community and beyond helps to deepen our understanding of the past. Also, the publication allows for peer review, enabling other scholars to refine their work and contribute to ongoing debates in the field.

The context of the transitional period in Lithuania

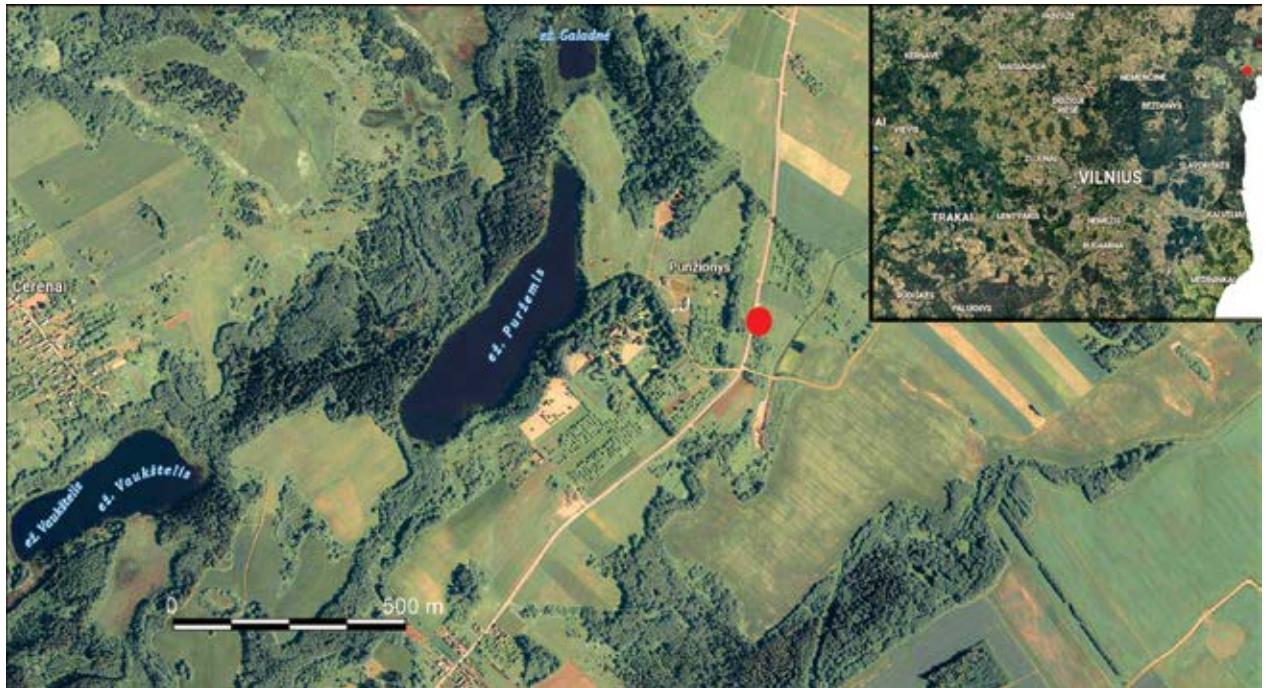
All the literature and discussions about the transformation period in 13th to 15th-century Lithuania is very well presented in one of the most recent books by Rytis Jonaitis and Irma Kaplūnaitė about the old cemetery Vilnius on Bokšto Street in Vilnius.¹ So this

paper just briefly introduces the main topics about the period.

This article concentrates information on the excavation of the Punžionys burial site as an example of a wider discussion about the transition from paganism to Christianity. It is generally accepted that after baptism, the cremation burial tradition changed to inhumation.² But in recent decades, information about sites from this period at Bajorai³ and Kernavė⁴ shows us that this transformation period was much more complicated. The first time the idea emerged about still-existing cremation during the period after Christianisation was when Vytautas Urbanavičius found a cremation ground at Obeliai (Ukmergė district).⁵ But his conclusions were not widely accepted. Now there is an opinion that these two traditions probably coexisted for some time, but inhumation burial traditions came to local communities influenced by Christian contacts either from the Catholic or Orthodox churches.⁶ These contacts in Lithuania were made before the official acceptance of Christianity.

Another topic discussed is whether objects that are put into the grave are adopted Christian customs or direct relics from paganism. There is no unanimous opinion about this. As an example, Eugenijus Svetikas⁷ sees mostly only Christian symbols in various decorations of grave goods; while others⁸ have a more rational opinion that some symbols might have come from a generational tradition, and as tolerance of the old custom just adopted by the new religion,

- 1 R. Jonaitis, I. Kaplūnaitė, *Senkapis Vilniuje, Bokšto gatvėje: XIII–XV a. laidosenos Lietuvoje bruožai*, Vilnius, 2020.
- 2 E. Svetikas, *Lietuvos didžiosios kunigaikštystės christianizacija XVI a. pab. – XV a. archeologiniai radiniai su krikščioniškais simboliais*, T. 1, Vilnius, 2009.
- 3 V. Vaitkevičius, Bajorų kapinynas, *Archeologiniai tyrinėjimai Lietuvoje 2012 metais*, Vilnius, 2013, pp. 181–191.
- 4 R. Vengalis, Semeniškių kapinynas, *Archeologiniai tyrinėjimai Lietuvoje 2010 metais*, Vilnius, 2011, pp. 124–127.
- 5 V. Urbanavičius, S. Urbanavičienė, *Archeologiniai tyrimai, Lietuvos archeologija T. 6*, Vilnius, 1988, pp. 9–63.
- 6 R. Jonaitis, I. Kaplūnaitė, *Senkapis Vilniuje, Bokšto gatvėje: XIII–XV a. laidosenos Lietuvoje bruožai*, Vilnius, 2020, pp. 30–33.
- 7 E. Svetikas, *Lietuvos didžiosios kunigaikštystės christianizacija XVI a. pab. – XV a. archeologiniai radiniai su krikščioniškais simboliais*, T. 1, Vilnius, 2009.
- 8 V. Urbanavičius, Lietuvių pagonybė ir jos relikta, *Liaudies kultūra*, T. 3, 1994, pp. 1–7



Map No 1. Orthophotography plan of the excavation site M 1:10000; red marks the place of the Punžionys burial site. Map by J. Račas.

in order to reduce resistance to the new rituals, because there were not enough priests or churches⁹ at the moment of Christianisation.

Geographical and historical information

The Punžionys burial site is in the Švenčionys district about 40 kilometres to the northeast of Vilnius and five kilometres west of where the Lithuanian-Belarusian border now is. Historically, it is part of the Vilnius voivodeship. So although it is not close to larger cities or towns, it is a historically close part of the Vilnius province.

There are two lakes topographically to the north and northwest of the site, and a swampy area between them (map No 1). A few centuries ago, they were probably one or closely connected lakes. To the south and southeast there is a small river, which joins the River Neris a few kilometres away.

The burial site was on the northwest part of a small hill, which is probably a lot flatter due to ploughing.

There is no known archaeological site dating from the 15th to the 18th century around this place. The closest hillfort is at Prienai (called Veršupka, Švenčionys district, Magūnai parish) 1.5 kilometres in a straight line to the southeast. It has been dated

9 L. Kurila, Laidojimas pilkapiuose krikščioniškoje Lietuvoje, *Lietuvos archeologija*, T. 45, 2019, pp. 219–264. Online: <https://doi.org/10.33918/25386514-045007>

to the beginning of the first millennium up to the beginning of the second millennium, due to a lack of information.

Rural Medieval burial sites in the eastern part of Lithuania are rare and not widely researched. The closest ones to the site are dated to the 13th and 14th centuries, and are at Sariai (Švenčionys district, 40 kilometres away, excavated in 1970 and 1971 by Ona Kuncienė¹⁰), and Paūdrionys (Šalčininkai district, 65 kilometres away, excavated from 2012 to 2017 by Manvydas Vitkūnas). Due to a lack of information about burial sites in Belarus, the author of this article cannot give any information about sites in other countries.

Councillor Jonas Vaivilavičius of Magūnai told us that at the beginning of the 20th century the road which connected two small villages went around the burial hill, but in Soviet times it was straightened and went directly through the hill.¹¹ Probably even after a few hundred years the hill was still in living memory, even though no one remembered that there was a burial site.

Excavation

The excavations extended over two years. The first year was to understand the size of the site, and date and plan the next phase of excavations. That year it was found that the burial site was of inhumation graves, some had items in them, so preliminary dating was the 16th and 17th centuries. The size of the site is about 1,200 square metres, and a lot of this is under the road, so the delay in funding meant that excavations took place only in 2018.

In 2018 excavations were carried out in 710 square metres of territory. The clayey soil made the excavations very hard, there were almost always no visible marks of graves until finding some bones. Even in the parts of the burial site which were on the edge, we found two to three layers of bodies. Most of them were laid with the head to the west, on their back, but there were some oriented to the northwest or the southeast. In some layers, the bodies are laid in quite clear rows. In different layers, bodies were laid one on another.

There were 286 graves in the excavated area in destroyed graves.¹² As the excavation was organised only in the place of the road reconstruction, it is very hard to say what the condition of other graves that are not under the road is. As in other sites, the upper layer of graves may have been disturbed by ploughing. The ploughing should have changed the view of the hill as well, because it is very hard to say why people were buried only on the southwest-west side of the hill in a different layer and not throughout all the hill.

Most of the graves are individual, just a few of them were identified as double graves. In the central part of the site four layers of graves were identified, the first layer was just 20 centimetres below the road surface, and the lowest layer of graves was 1.3 metres deep. People were buried in square pits in wooden coffins, but there were no remains of them, only a few nails were found by the bodies, probably because of the very heavy clayey soil which affected iron. The backfill of the pits is the same colour as the surrounding clay, so there were no clear pit marks as the excavations took place.

The excavation results show that in this burial site inhumation burials were put in wooden coffins

10 O. Kuncienė, Sariai senkapis, *Lietuvos archeologija*, T. 1, Vilnius, 1979, pp. 76–100.

11 Jonas Vaivilavičius' personal conversation with the author.

12 J. Kozakaitė, R. Brindzaitė, *Žmonių palaikų iš Punžionių senkapio, Švenčionių raj.*, (2018 m. archeologiniai tyrimai) antropologinė ataskaita, Vilnius, 2020–2021, pp. 1–39.

with a Christian orientation to the west. There were up to four layers of burials, most layers were in the central part of the site. Some burials were laid in rows. The burial site expands to the north and south sides of the road. These parts were not excavated, as no ground-work existed relating to the road's reconstruction.

These excavations show that it is quite a good example of a rural burial site from the 15th to 17th centuries where the old tradition of putting grave goods for the dead expands to the period after Christianisation.

Punžionys burial site material

One of the groups of finds in the graves are daily things, which were used every day and probably came to graves as part of the burial robe.

Knives were the most common grave item in this excavation, which were found in 94 graves

(Fig. 1 [5–6], 2 [4]). What is interesting is that these knives were put in the graves throughout all the existence of the burial ground from the 15th to the 17th century, and it had some symbolic meaning, because they were put in the graves of children, women and men. So, it did not correlate with age or sex.

Buckles and other parts of them were found in 61 graves (Fig. 2 [2,5], 3 [3]). Graves with one buckle were considered as for daily use, without an interpretation for any underworld use. Graves with more than two buckles should be considered as grave items, because there should have been something else a belt with a buckle was used for, for example, for a purse or a sheath for a knife. More than two buckles were found in 14 graves.

Other items which were found in children's as well and adults' graves were iron splitters and flint pieces (Fig. 2 [3], 3 [2, 4–5]), which were used to make fire. They were put into graves dated to the end of the 16th century. They were found in 20 graves.

Table 1. Grave inventory

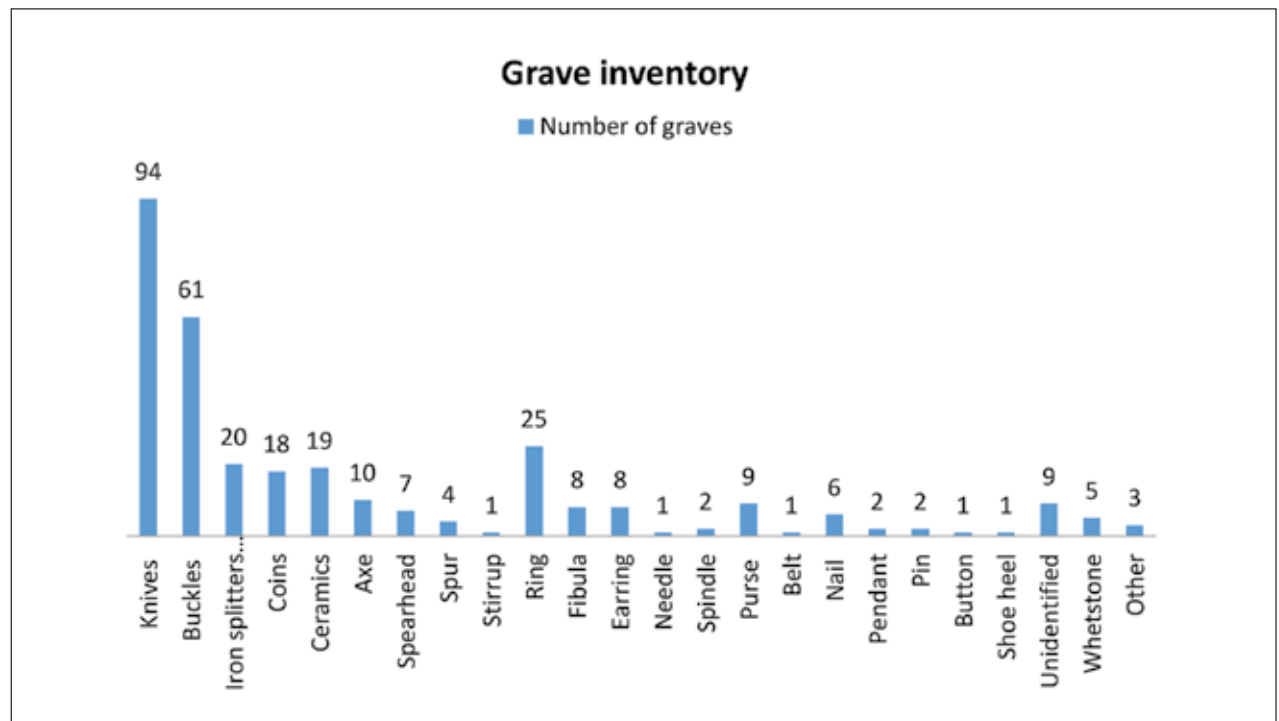




Fig. 1. Grave items from adult male grave 75. Photographs by Darius Žvirblis.



Fig. 2. Grave items from adult male grave 152. Photographs by D. Žvirblis.



Fig. 3. Grave items from adult grave 154. Photographs by D. Žvirblis.

Coins were found in 18 graves (Fig. 3 [1]). There were also remains of purses in nine of them. Unfortunately, not all the coins were identified. But we can see this tradition clearly up to the end of the 16th century.

Ceramics were found in 19 graves (Fig. 1 [3–4], 3 [3]), suggesting that after death rituals were associated with feasting for the deceased person. Sometimes there were even intact bowls put in graves, as in grave 178, and disturbed graves from the 2017 excavations. Bowls were found by the head and near the feet too. There was no exact place for ceramic pieces, sometimes they were put into the backfill of the grave, sometimes under the deceased person.

There were 17 graves with finds that could be identified as warrior equipment (Fig. 2 [1, 6]). These are axes, spearheads and spurs. They were put into graves until the middle of the 15th century. Spears and axes were put in a position by the leg or by the

humerus. Some of the axes and spearheads are smaller than others, they are indicated as such in Table 2.

Other common finds in graves were rings, which were found in 25 graves (Fig. 1 [2], 4 [6]). Graves 75 (Fig. 1 [2]) and 272 had rings with frontplates (signetic?) with signs on them.

Fibulas were found in eight graves (Fig. 4 [3–5]). Usually there were more than one, some are of different kinds. They were put into graves from the 15th up to the beginning, and maybe the middle, of the 16th century.

Earrings were found in eight graves (Fig. 1 [1], 4 [1–2]). What is interesting is that sometimes one earring was put into men's graves, like graves 75 (Fig. 1 [1]) and 123.

There were some finds associated with housework: two spindles and one needle. In one grave there was another typical find of this period, a key (grave 162).

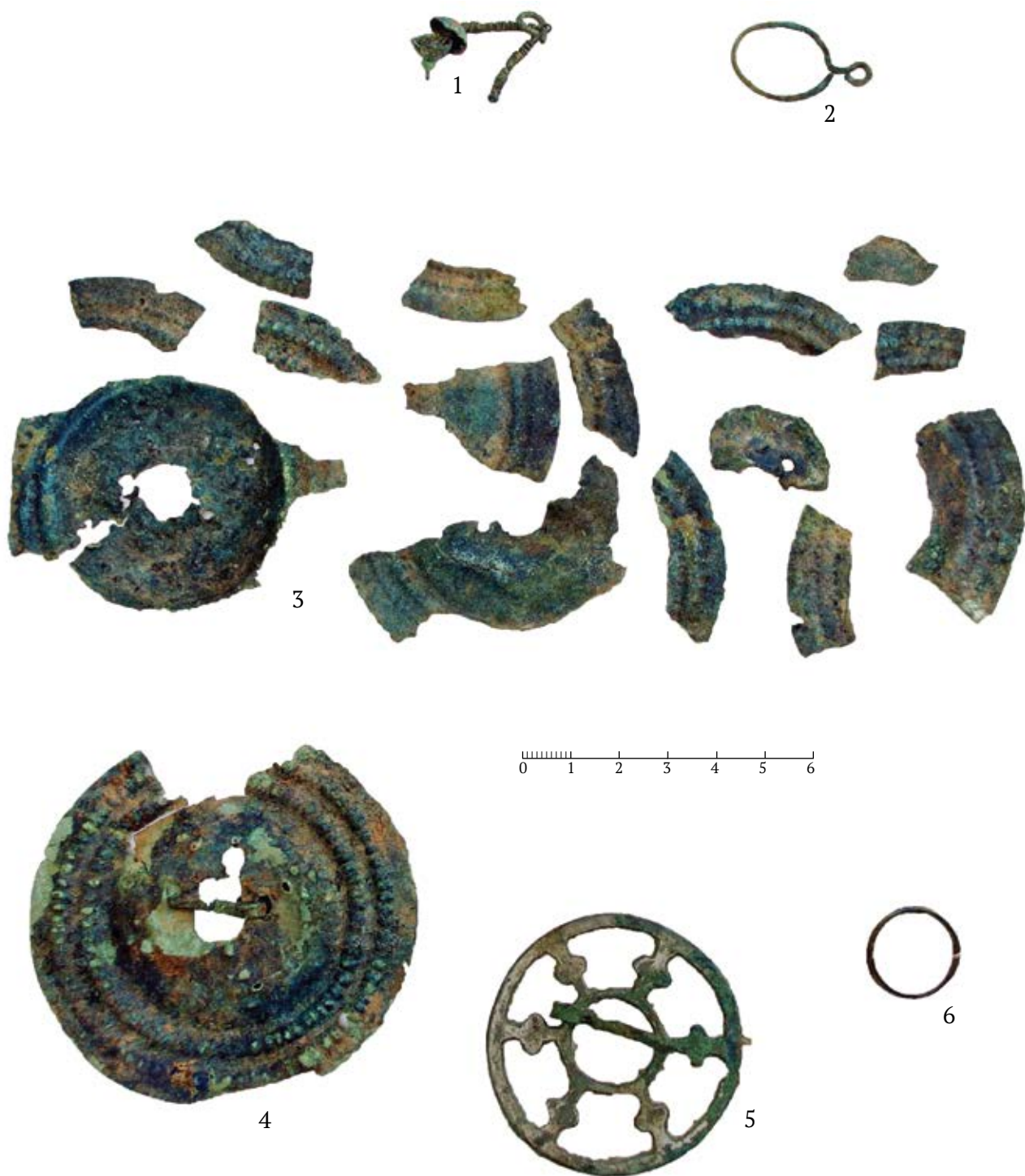


Fig. 4. Grave items from adult female grave 181. Photographs by D. Žvirblis.

Despite the poor soil conditions, there were some leather objects. A belt with sheeted buttons was found in grave 205, and purses in nine graves. In two graves there were the remains of fabric conserved by the copper beside them. In two graves there were two small pins, which were probably used for attaching robes.

We found some individual finds in the areas between the graves, which could be from disturbed graves (coins, pieces of ceramics, nails, rings, buckles).

Some of the richest and most interesting inventories are shown in the illustrations.

Each grave and its inventory is described in Table 2.

Table 2

Grave No	Layer	Age	Sex	Burial items	Comment*
12	1	11	Child	Knife	
				Nail	
17	1	17–20	Man	Knife	
21	1	Adult	Woman	Knife	
				Buckle	
22	1	7	Child	Coin	Denar. Grand Duchy of Lithuania, Casimir IV Jagiellon?, 15th c.
				Ring	
25	2	40–50	Man	Coin	Denar. Grand Duchy of Lithuania, Alexander Jagiellon, 1495–1506
				Buckle	
				Knife	
27	2	>50	Woman	Knife	
28	2	>40	Man	Knife	
30	2	15	Teenager	Ring	
34	2	7	Child	Buckle	
				Knife	
36	2	Adult	Woman	Coin	Denar. Grand Duchy of Lithuania, Alexander Jagiellon, 1495–1503, 2 pieces
				Knife	
				Round copper sheets	
40	2	>50	Man	Buckle	
				Nail	
41	2	30–39	Man	Buckle	
				Coin	
				Purse	

* All types of finds are identified according to Eugenijus Svetikas book: E. Svetikas, *Lietuvos didžiosios kunigaikštystės christianizacija XVI a. pab. – XV a. archeologiniai radiniai su krikščioniškais simboliais*, T. 2, Vilnius, 2009.

43	2	30-39	Man	Buckle	2 pieces
				Knife	
49	1	>18	-	Knife	
51	1	20-25	-	Knife	
52	2	>18	-	Ceramics	
53	1	>18	-	Ring	
54	1	16-18	Teenager	Purse	Fragments 4 pieces
59	1	16-19	Teenager	Spur	2 pieces
60	2	40-49	Man	Knife	
				Buckle	
61	2	20-25	Man	Ring	
62	2		Man	Knife	
79	2	25-30	Man	Coin	Half groat. Alexander Jagiellon
				Knife	
74	2		Woman	Ring	
75	2	20-29	Man	Knife	2 pieces
				Earring	Looped
				Ring	Signet
				Purse	Purse
				Coin	Denar. Grand Duchy of Lithuania. Vytautas the Great. 6 pieces
76	2	>50	Man	Splitter	2 pieces
				Axe	Wide blade
77	2	20-25	Woman	Buckle	
				Knife	
91	3	>18	-	Knife	
97	3	>18	-	Knife	
				Buckle	
99	3	18-20	Man?	Splitter	
				Buckle	
				Flint	
				Spearhead	
101	3	30-39	Man	Ring	Spiral
				Splitter	
102	3	25-30	Woman	Ring	Band type II
103	4		Man	Fabric	
104	3	10-15	Teenager	Buckle	
				Knife	

105	4	>50	Woman	Knife	
107	4	Adult	Man?	Fasteners	3 pieces
				Axe	Wide blade
				Knife	
				Buckle	
109	4	35–45	Woman	Knife	
121	4	>18		Handle	Knife?
				Buckle	5 pieces
123	4	Adult	Man	Earring	
129	4	Adult	Woman	Knife	
137	3	35–45	Man	Knife	
				Fasteners	5 pieces
67	1	>50	Man	Knife	
68	1	10–15	Teenager	Spearhead	Socketed
				Axe	Wide blade (mini)
				Splitter	
69	1	9	Child	Knife	
				Buckle	
88	3	40–49	Man?	Axe	Wide blade
				Fabric	
				Fibula	Flat type II, 3 pieces
				Fibula	Rosette
				Knife	
89	3	4	Child	Splitter	
				Knife	
				Fasteners	
90	3	1	Child	Knife	
91	3	>18	–	Knife	
93	3	>18	–	Buckle	
				Knife	
119	1	35–45	Man	Knife	
120	1	10	Child	Buckle	3 pieces
131	2	>18	–	Spur	
132	2	–	–	Nail	
133	2	3–5	Child	Ceramics	
				Buckle	
				Knife	
134	2	30–39	Woman	Ceramics	
147	3		Man	Buckle	

148	3	>18	-	Buckle	
				Knife	
149	3		Man	Spearhead	Socketed, 2 pieces
150	3	>18	-	Ring	
				Whetstone	
152	3	>18	Man	Knife	2 pieces
				Ring	
154	3	>18	-	Coin	
				Splitter	2 pieces
				Flint	
				Buckle	
111	1	>50	-	Knife	
113	1	12	Child	Knife	
114	1	Adult	Man	Knife	
125	2	35-45	Man	Knife	
126	2	16-18	Teenager	Knife	
127	2	>18	-	Knife	
				Ceramics	
128	2	18	-	Ceramics	
137	3	35-45	Man	Knife	
138	3	>40	Man	Knife	
				Splitter	
				Buckle	2 pieces
				Flint	2 pieces
139	3	35-45	Man	Shoe heel	
				Knife	
				Coin	Obol. Sigismund II Augustus. 34 pieces 1546-1554
				Purse	
				Buckle	
				Axe	Wide blade (mini)
152	3	Adult	Man	Knife	
				Splitter	
				Buckle	2 pieces
				Axe	Wide blade(mini)
				Spearhead	Socketed (mini)
155	4	20-29	Man	Unidentified	Copper
				Knife	2 pieces
157	4	15	Teenager	Splitter	
				Knife	2 pieces

159	4	8	Child	Knife	
160	4	Adult	Man	Knife	2 pieces
				Whetstone	
				Ring	
				Pendant	
142	1	40–49	Man	Buckle	2 pieces
				Knife	
144	1	35–45	Man	Knife	2 pieces
				Buckle	
				Unidentified	
161	1	40–49	Woman	Knife	
162	1	18–20	Woman	Key	
163	1	>18	-	Unidentified	
171	2	>50	Woman	Knife	
174	1	7	Child	Ceramics	
175	1	4	Child	Ceramics	
178	1	40–49	Man	Ceramics	Cup
180	1	Adult	Man	Ceramics	
				Fasteners	
				Buckle	
				Coin	
				Purse	
				Knife	
182	2		Woman	Ceramics	
173	1	>18	-	Spindle	
				Ring	Band type I
				Knife	
179	1	Adult	Man	Buckle	5 pieces
				Splitter	
				Ring	
				Axe	Wide blade
222	2	5–10	Child	Ring	
224	2	Adult	Man	Knife	3 pieces
				Buckle	
225	2	25–30	Woman	Coin	Sigismund II Augustus. 1547
226	2	25–30	Woman	Knife	2 pieces
200	1	Adult	Man	Buckle	
				Knife	
201	1	30–39	Man	Buckle	

207	1		Man	Flint	2 pieces
208	1	30-39	Woman	Nail	2 pieces
				Buckle	
210	1	Adult	Man	Buckle	
				Unidentified	
211	1	3-5	Child	Knife	
212	1	18-25	Woman	Ceramics	
				Knife	
213	1	15	Teenager	Knife	
				Buckle	
181	1	30-39	Woman	Ring	
				Earring	
				Spindle	
				Nail	
190	1	40-49	Man	Pendant	
				Knife	
				Buckle	3 pieces
				Whetstone	
192	1	>18	-	Unidentified	
				Spur	
				Knife	
				Buckle	
193	1	40-49	Man	Coin	Sigismund II Augustus?
194	1	>50	Woman	Knife	2 pieces
				Buckle	
218	2	Adult	Woman	Flint	
				Knife	
235	1	30-39	Woman	Knife	
236	1	7	Child	Ceramics	
239	1	>50	Woman	Ceramics	
				Flint	
				Knife	2 pieces
				Buckle	
				Needle	
240	1	20-25	Woman	Ring	Band type II. 2 pieces
242	1	40-49	Man	Flint	
				Splitter	
				Buckle	2 pieces
				Knife	

244	1	20–29	Woman	Flint	
263	2	Adult	Man	Buckle	3 pieces
				Unidentified	
				Flint	
266	2	>50	Woman	Buckle	
				Coin	Denar. Prussia. Albrecht von Brandenburg. 1525–1548.
268	2	Adult	Woman	Knife	
				Pin	
				Earring	
276	3	25–35	Woman	Nail	2 pieces
277	3	20–29	Man	Flint	
				Sheeting	2 pieces
				Purse	Bag?
				Splitter	
				Axe	Narrow blade
278	4	>40	Woman	Coin	Halfgross. Poland. Jan I Olbracht. 1492–1499
248	1	Adult	Man	Buckle	2 pieces
				Knife	
				Spearhead	Socketed
252	2	>18	–	Knife	
254	2	40–49	Man	Ceramics	
255	2	8	Child	Ceramics	
				Knife	With handle
256	2	>18	–	Knife	
				Buckle	
258	2	3	Child	Knife	
				Buckle	
269	3	Adult	Man	Buckle	
				Knife	
				Whetstone	
270	3	Adult	Man	Knife	
				Coin	Denar. Grand Duchy of Lithuania. Vytautas the Great. 1411–1430
271	3	>18	–	Knife	
				Buckle	
272	3	20–25	Man	Ring	Signet/with ornament
				Knife	
				Unidentified	

275	3	11	Child	Earring	
				Ring	
279	4	>18	-	Buckle	
				Splitter	
				Axe	Wide blade (mini)
				Spearhead	Socketed (mini)
280	4	>18	-	Knife	2 pieces
				Axe	Wide blade
				Buckle	2 pieces
281	4	Adult	Woman	Fibula	Flat type II. 2 pieces
				Fibula	Omega with looped ends
				Buckle	
				Bell	
				Ring	
				Knife	
282	4	>40	Woman	Ceramics	
				Earring	2 pieces
				Buckle	
				Knife	
283	4	>50	Woman	Unidentified	
				Earring	
284	4	>18	-	Flint	
				Spur	2 pieces
				Knife	
				Splitter	
				Flint	
				Buckle	2 pieces
				Spearhead	Socketed
285	5	Adult	Woman	Whetstone	
				Knife	
				Button	
				Fibula	Flat type II
				Ring	Band type I. 2 pieces
286	5	20-29	Man	Coin	Denar. Grand Duchy of Lithuania. Vytautas the Great. 1411-1430. 4 pieces
				Buckle	
219	1	>18	-	Knife	2 pieces
				Knife	
				Buckle	
				Earring	

220	1	Adult	Man	Knife	
				Buckle	
221	1	Adult	Man	Knife	
				Buckle	2 pieces
223	2	40–49	Man	Knife	2 pieces
229	2	30–39	Man	Ring	
230	2	25–35	Woman	Buckle	
				Pin	
				Coin	2 denars. Sigismund II Augustus. 1567
232	3	>50	Woman	Fibula	Flat type II. 4 pieces
233	3	>50	Woman	Ring	
234	3	>35	Woman	Knife	
				Buckle	
245	3	Adult	Man	Buckle	
246	3	Adult	Woman	Buckle	
				Coin	Denar. Grand Duchy of Lithuania, Alexander Jagiellon, 1503–1506
				Knife	
				Earring	
247	3	Adult	Man	Stirrup?	
				Ring	
196	3	35–45	Woman	Fibula	Flat type II. 2 pieces
				Fibula	Type I fibula with the symbol of a wheel
				Ring	
				Earring	2 pieces
				Ring	
46	1	15	Teenager	Purse	
				Sheeting	
				Knife	
50	1	35–45	Man	Purse	With sheeting
				Coin	
63	1	30–39	Man	Purse	With sheeting
				Knife	
205	1	35–45	Man	Knife	
				Ceramics	
				Leather belt	With sheeting



Fig. 5. A sacrifice of a fibula cut with sickle and a Vytautas denar coin (early 15th century) *in situ*. Photograph by J. Račas.



Fig. 6. A sacrifice of a gouge and chisel items. Photograph by D. Žvirblis.

There also were some finds that could be identified as sacrifices. One of these was a fibula with a sickle in the middle of it and a Vytautas denar (early 15th century) next to it (Fig. 5). Another example is two woodworking tools, a gouge and a chisel (Fig. 6), which were laid separately from other graves as well. At least two full ceramic bowls were found separately from the graves, which indicates a food sacrifice in memory of the dead.

Some grave finds were aside from the body. For example, teenager grave 59, dated to the beginning of the 15th century, had two spurs put one on top of the other next to the right foot, which also indicates some kind of sacrifice to the deceased.

Sacrifices in this period graves are a very interesting and still poorly explored tradition. The author of this article believes that sometimes sacrifices could be identified as accidental finds, so their identification in earlier works may be not so well documented. Scientific excavations almost stopped in Lithuania in recent years, so there are not many articles about this period.

Discussion

Rescue archaeology sometimes lets us know about new and very exciting sites. The burial site was probably abandoned at the end of the 16th or the beginning of the 17th century. Why it happened is hard to say. Maybe it was connected with some traditional rituals which disappeared over a period of time, and the Jesuits coming to Lithuania. This burial place is only 40 kilometres from Vilnius, and the city's influence must have been quite strong. Of course, the distribution of priests and churches was not so wide at the time of Christianisation. Also, maybe there was some tolerance of the old traditions in the acceptance

of the new religion, and a belief that over time those traditions would vanish.¹³

It is still questionable what community was buried at this burial ground. We do not know what local village or city was near here, so it is probable that a place where the community was living could be found somewhere nearby. Also, it is probable that new excavations in the future will give us more answers.

The lack of this kind of site is one of the problems in understanding how rural people lived in the transformation period. Excavations are often fragmented, usually just stating the fact that there was a burial site, and the period it was used.

Conclusion

This article presents the inhumation burial ground at Punžionys (Švenčionys district) from the period after Lithuania's Christianisation, when two burial traditions collided.

There were 286 graves and at least 67 destroyed graves in the 710-square-metre excavated area. The burial site was used from the beginning of the 15th to the 17th century. All that time, the local community still retained some burial rites left over from paganism. In the central part of the burial ground, there were up to four layers of the dead. In some parts, bodies were laid in rows; but there are no indications of mass graves.

It is clear that after Christianisation there was still a tradition of putting not very Christian things into graves, but it is still very hard to say whether these things were adapted to Christianity, or if the old tradition was tolerated. Maybe new excavations and new discussions will help us understand better this very important period.

13 L. Kurila, Laidojimas pilkapiuose krikščioniškoje Lietuvoje, *Lietuvos archeologija*, T. 45, 2019, pp. 219–264. Online: <https://doi.org/10.33918/25386514-045007>.

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XV–XVII a. Punžionių kapinyno tyrinėjimai 2017–2018 metais

Justinas Račas

2017–2018 m. buvo tiriamas XV–XVII a. datuojamas Punžionių kapinynas. Jo vieta buvo aptikta atsitiktinai, vykdant kelio darbus, apie jo egzistavimą iki šiol nebuvo žinoma. Iš viso buvo ištirtas 710 m² plotas ir aptikti 286 bei identifiukuoti dar bent 67 suardyti kapai. Kapinės buvo labai kompaktiškos, bendras jų plotas galėjo siekti apie 1 200 m². Žmonės buvo laidojami daugiausia galvomis į vakarus, lentinuose karstuose, keliais sluoksniais, centrinėje dalyje buvo fiksuoti 4 mirusiųjų sluoksniai. Kai kuriose vietose galima identifiukuoti mirusiųjų laidojimą eilėmis, masinių kapaviečių nebuvo identifiukuota.

Daugelis kapų buvo su įkapėmis, būdingomis šio pradinio krikščionybės laikotarpio kapams: sagtimis, peiliais, ietigaliais, kirviais, pentiniais, auskarais, segėmis, pinigėmis, monetomis. Taip pat aptikta radinių, kurie identifiukuoti kaip aukos. Vienas iš tokių buvo pjautuvu persmeigta plokštelinė segė ir Vytauto denaras, taip pat staliaus / luotų statytojo įrankiai: stambus skobtuvas ir kaltas, pavienių sveikų ir sudaužytų puodų.