

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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Christians in a Pagan Environment. Medieval Urban Cemeteries in Lithuania in the 13th and Early 15th Centuries

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The 13th–15th centuries in Lithuania were a complex period of transition when Christianity replaced paganism. This period is particularly important in terms of changing funerary customs. It is unclear whether there was a direct link between Christianity and the spread of the tradition of inhumation. It is also not known when and how the Lithuanians ceased following the custom of cremation and began to practise inhumation and construct flat burials. Archaeological material from the first Lithuanian cities of Kernavė and Vilnius, where early burial sites have been investigated, plays an important role in the study of this period. Here, the deceased townspeople were buried according to Christian traditions even before the official baptism in 1387. This study raises important questions: who were the people buried according to Christian traditions in pagan lands under a pagan ruler? Why did the first medieval inhumation burials appear in cities? The most recent archaeological evidence is used for the discussion of possible reasons and circumstances for the emergence and existence of the inhumation tradition in pagan cities.

Keywords: Middle Ages, Orthodox believers, burial sites, burial features.

Introduction

Lithuania remained a pagan state for the longest time in Europe, officially accepting Catholic baptism only in 1387. By comparison, Poland was baptised in 966 and Kievan Rus in 988. For 400 years, Lithuania's neighbours were Christian: Orthodox in the east

and Catholic in the north and south. Of course, the inhabitants of Lithuania were familiar with Christianity before the official baptism. The first contacts of Lithuanians with Christianity date back to the time before the formation of the Lithuanian state.¹

1 E. Gudavičius, Brunonas Kverfurtietis ir Lietuva, *1009 metai: Šv. Brunono Kverfuritečio misija*, ed. I. Leonavičiūtė, 2006, pp. 9–65; M. Ščavinskas, Baltų kariauninkų kontaktai su Kijevo Rusios ir Lenkijos valstybėmis prasidedančios christianizacijos kontekste (XI–XIII a. pirma pusė), *Vakarykščio pasaulio atgarsiai*, mokslinių straipsnių rinkinys, skirtas Lietuvos valstybės atkūrimo 100-osioms metinėms, 2018, pp. 50–71.

By the time the state was established, the influence of Christianity would have been felt in all areas of urban life and all social circles, from the ruling elite to the common people.

When talking about burial features in the territory of ethnic Lithuania during the Middle Ages, a simple model can be applied: pagan Lithuanians cremated their dead, while Christian newcomers buried their deceased in inhumation burials. From 1387, the newly baptised Lithuanians, who had previously been pagans, began to practise inhumation as part of their adopted Catholic faith. However, the wider context revealed by research shows that the period of transition was not as straightforward, which leaves many unanswered questions. For instance, is there a direct link between Christianity and the spread of inhumation? When did Lithuanians stop cremating their dead and start building flat inhumation burials? Recent investigations of burial sites from the transitional period suggest that some of the deceased may have been buried without cremation even before the official baptism. The first inhumation burials may have appeared in Prussia and eastern Lithuania as early as the 11th and 12th centuries, while the spread of the custom of burial without cremation may be linked to the influence of Christianity.² It should also be noted that even after 1387, burials continued to include features unrelated to Christian customs but characteristic of pagan tradition, such as the deposition of grave goods.

When studying the material of late medieval cemeteries in eastern Lithuania, it is necessary to distinguish between the burials that were built after the official Catholic baptism in 1387 and the urban burial grounds that existed in a pagan environment and exhibit Christian burial features. The latter can

be attributed to Christian newcomers who buried the dead according to their traditions. However, another theory has been put forward in Lithuanian archaeology, which argues that the custom of inhumation may have been practised by some of the local pagan city dwellers before the baptism of 1387.³ The question of the denominational affiliation of the people who buried their deceased in inhumation burials is important here. To determine this, the characteristics of pagan and Christian burials, grave goods and their association with a particular community, and, of course, the chronology of the burials and the artefacts found in them, must also be discussed.

It has now been settled that the earliest cities or proto-cities of ethnic Lithuania were Kernavė and Vilnius. The first urban cemeteries have been discovered in these centres and are well-researched. The discoveries have raised several key questions to which there is still no definitive answer; various arguments have been put forward, sometimes using the same point to express both sides of the argument. The main question, to which there is no single answer, is who were the people buried in the Christian tradition in the cities of pagan Lithuania? For example, the researchers of Kernavė⁴ associate the burial ground of Kriveikiškis with the Yotvingians, who were resettled in Lithuania; these researchers also express doubts about the connection between the burial ground on Bokšto Street in Vilnius and the Civitas Rutenica or the Ruthenian Town. Archaeologists who have investigated the burial site at Bokšto Street argue that both burial sites in Kernavė and Vilnius reflect Christian funerary customs and can be linked to the Orthodox tradition; furthermore, the burial site in Latako Street in Vilnius reflects a rooted Christian tradition and burial in a churchyard.

2 For more detail, see G. Zabiela, *Ikivalstybinis ir baltų genčių sąjungų laikotarpis, Lietuvos istorija. T. 2: Geležies amžius*, 2007, pp. 413–467; M. Ščavinskas, *Baltų kariauninkų kontaktai...*, pp. 50–71.

3 A. Luchtanas, G. Vėlius, *Laidosena Lietuvoje XIII–XIV a., Vidurio Lietuvos archeologija: etnokultūriniai ryšiai*, 1996, pp. 84–85.

4 Here, the reference is to archaeologists A. Luchtanas and G. Vėlius who have been researching Kernavė for many years.

This article presents the most recent results and insights from investigations at three of the earliest urban cemeteries in Kernavė and Vilnius. It also outlines the possible reasons and circumstances for the emergence and presence of these Christian burial grounds in a pagan environment.

The state of research on Lithuanian urban burial sites dated to the period of transition from paganism to Christianity

The historiography related to the burial features of the transitional period was presented and summarised in a the monograph dedicated to the burial ground on Bokšto Street, published in 2020.⁵ This study will, therefore, present the most important and recent works, as well as key ideas related to the questions raised above, and will focus on urban burial grounds.⁶

We would like to begin the overview of the historiography of urban burial grounds with the cemetery that was discovered in Alytus⁷ in 1984.⁸ It is dated to between the end of the 14th century and the 17th century (meaning that it was used after the official baptism of Lithuania). Investigations into the cemetery of Alytus are held to be the very first study of a burial ground from the transitional period that was successfully disseminated to the scientific community. The most important work in this respect was

done by Eugenijus Svetikas, who led the investigations of the Alytus cemetery. In his numerous studies,⁹ E. Svetikas argues that archaeological material from the late 14th and 15th centuries in Lithuania and neighbouring countries has not yielded any finds or symbols of paganism.¹⁰ Admittedly, such a conclusion sounds rather categorical. It does not take into account the discovery of cremation burials from the 13th to the 15th centuries, which contain the same type of finds found in contemporaneous inhumation burials.¹¹ In addition, he associates some of the universal symbols exclusively with Christianity. In his work, E. Svetikas emphasises that most cemeteries with inhumations dated in earlier literature to the 13th–14th centuries appeared later, only after 1387 when Lithuania was officially baptised as a Catholic country; the artefacts found in such burial sites are also dated to after the baptism.¹² The chronology of burial sites is a key task in the study of the spread of inhumation in Lithuania because it is crucial for determining whether inhumation was practised before the official baptism.

In addition to works dealing with different groups of finds, E. Svetikas has also prepared a review of research on Lithuanian medieval burial grounds and a summary of historiography.¹³ In the review, he criticises researchers who tend to recognise the material record of burials as pagan. In particular, the work of Vytautas Urbanavičius is harshly criticised,

5 R. Jonaitis, I. Kaplūnaitė, *Senkapis Vilniuje, Bokšto gatvėje. XIII–XV a. laidosenos Lietuvoje bruožai*, Vilnius, 2020, pp. 15–64.

6 In this paper, only the Lithuanian historiography is reviewed. A whole separate article would be required in order to discuss the historiography of neighbouring countries.

7 In the author's opinion, it was the archaeological investigations at the Alytus cemetery that first sparked interest in Lithuanian urban burial grounds.

8 E. Svetikas, *Alytaus kapinynas: christianizacijos šaltiniai*, Vilnius, 2003, p. 9.

9 This article will deal with the key ideas proposed by E. Svetikas in his numerous works on the burial features of the transitional period.

10 E. Svetikas, *Lietuvos Didžiosios Kunigaikštystės christianizacija XIV a. pab. – XV a.: archeologiniai radiniai su krikščioniškais simboliais*, T. 1, Vilnius, 2009, p. 457.

11 For more detail, see G. Petrauskas, *Laidosena viduramžių Lietuvoje: mirusiųjų deginimo paprotys*, doctoral thesis, Vilnius University, 2017, pp. 128–136.

12 For example, E. Svetikas, *Lietuvos Didžiosios Kunigaikštystės christianizacija*, p. 13.

13 E. Svetikas, Christianizacijos šaltinių paieška Lietuvos XIV a. pabaigos – XVIII a. pradžios kapinynų medžiagoje, *Lituanistica* 1 (49), 2002, pp. 74–97.

and E. Svetikas points out that the material from medieval burial sites has been interpreted too loosely.¹⁴ At this point, we must disagree with the criticism of E. Svetikas. V. Urbanavičius is less categorical in his work as he agrees that there was a transitional period in Lithuania when Christian funerary tradition had not yet taken root and pagan customs were still practised.¹⁵ E. Svetikas purposefully searches for reflections of Christianity in the archaeological material, leaving aside all the artefacts that would fall in between categories and which were definitely present during this complex period. Summing up the work of E. Svetikas, it should be noted that his conclusions regarding the finds discovered in burials, their symbolism and the chronology of the burials themselves are in some cases questionable. Nevertheless, the amount of material collected by the author is immense and a great deal of work has been done to set up typologies and catalogues and to identify analogous artefacts.

The next stage of research into urban burial sites is closely related to the discovery of the Kriveikiškis burial ground in Kernavė in 1993. At the beginning of the investigations, it was the only such urban pre-Christian site of the 13th–14th century with inhumation burials in Lithuania. At the beginning of the excavations, a controversy arose as to whom the cemetery belonged to. With the unearthing of new evidence, initial hypotheses that were put forward by researchers changed and were updated. The main question that arose at the very start of investigations was the faith of the community: were

they Orthodox or pagan? This question remained throughout the years of research on the burial site and even later, with the beginning of archaeological investigations in Bokšto Street, Vilnius. In the course of the research at the Kriveikiškis burial site, several articles were published presenting the discoveries and providing new insights into this burial monument.¹⁶ It has been established that although some of the grave goods uncovered were imported, the majority of the artefacts were produced locally. This fact was also confirmed by analogous finds from the lower town of Kernavė, in the Pajauta Valley.¹⁷ The dating of the Kriveikiškis cemetery to the 13th–14th centuries is supported by both archaeological evidence and the historical context. The Kernavė burial ground undoubtedly predates the official Catholic baptism and dates back to pagan Lithuania. This leads to the hypothesis that the discoveries made in this burial ground can be linked to the Christian community.

However, Gintautas Vėlius, the discoverer of the Kriveikiškis burial site, and Aleksiejus Luchtanas, a long-time researcher of the Kernavė archaeological site, disagree with the assumption that Orthodox Christians could have been buried in the Kriveikiškis burial site. They also question the claim that the ‘official baptism of the state is the direct and sole cause of the disappearance of the cremation custom’.¹⁸ On the other hand, they do not completely exclude the possibility that the ‘local funerary customs may have changed under the influence of Christian lands’.¹⁹ According to Kernavė’s researchers, the use of inhumation in the period before the official baptism

14 E. Svetikas, *Christianizacijos šaltinių paieška...*, p. 85.

15 V. Urbanavičius, *Senųjų tikėjimų relikvai Lietuvoje XV–XVII amžiais (1. Pagoniškiųjų laidojimo papročių nykimas rytų Lietuvoje)*, *MADA* 3(48), 1974, p. 77.

16 A. Luchtanas, G. Vėlius, *Laidosena Lietuvoje...*, pp. 80–88; G. Vėlius, *Kernavės – Kriveikiškių XIII–XIV a. kapinynas ir Rytų Lietuvos senkapiai*, *Baltų archeologija*, 1 (10), 1997, pp. 26–34; G. Vėlius, *Kernavės – Kriveikiškių XIII–XIV a. kapinynas ir Rytų Lietuvos senkapiai*, *Baltų archeologija*, 1–2 (11–12), 1998, pp. 38–48; G. Vėlius, *XIII–XIV a. Kernavės kapinyno apgalviai*, *Lietuvos archeologija* 21, 2001, pp. 383–398.

17 A. Luchtanas, G. Vėlius, *Laidosena Lietuvoje...*, p. 82.

18 A. Luchtanas, G. Vėlius, *Laidosena Lietuvoje...*, p. 85.

19 A. Luchtanas, G. Vėlius, *Laidosena Lietuvoje...*, p. 85.

was due to several reasons. Firstly, the attempt by Grand Duke Mindaugas to consolidate territories and homogenise religious attitudes; second, the influence of enslaved Christian women, who introduced Christianity directly to the Lithuanians; and lastly, the reform of Šventaragis, which was associated with the spread of inhumation, while cremation was reserved for the elite.²⁰

Further, G. Vėlius and A. Luchtanas argue that graves housed in the burial ground of Kriveikiškis burial ground resemble those of the Yotvingians: relatively poor graves of men, the deceased placed in the ground uncremated, and the predominant orientation of the graves towards the west. All these elements are attributed to Yotvingian customs rather than Christianity.²¹ G. Vėlius also attributes the prevalence of exceptional finds - namely, the chaplets - to the Yotvingians.²² According to G. Vėlius, not only the chaplets but 'the entire assemblage of artefacts recovered from the burial ground at Kernavė closely resembles the burial record of the Yotvingians'.²³

The increased dissemination of archaeological material from Kriveikiškis at the end of the last century meant that a greater number of other researchers were able to present their hypotheses. One of the first to propose his theory was the archaeologist Gintautas Zabiela, who published a thorough analysis of pagan funerary customs in Lithuania.²⁴ He points out that the transition from cremation to inhumation is usually associated with Slavic ethnicity or conversion to Christianity.²⁵ According to G. Zabiela, Lithuania was surrounded by the Christian world during the

period of state formation, which undoubtedly influenced pagan culture and, consequently, religion and burial practices.²⁶

A full-length monograph on the Kriveikiškis burial ground was published in 2005. Here, G. Vėlius presents the archaeological record of the site, its analogies and hypotheses about the community buried there.²⁷ The main points presented in the book are largely consistent with the earlier insights. Having systematised all the arguments presented earlier and in the monograph, we suggest that the Kriveikiškis burial site reflects a slightly earlier, less pronounced stage of the Orthodox burial tradition, i.e. it should be considered as an intermediate variant. Kriveikiškis was a burial site reserved for Orthodox townspeople. It is important to note that we are talking about denominational affiliation rather than ethnicity, because ethnicity cannot be determined, at least for the time being. The deceased may have been Ruthenians, Lithuanians, Yotvingians, or any other ethnic group. The less pronounced elements of the Christian faith in Kriveikiškis can be attributed to the fact that Orthodox Christians did not form a large part of the population; moreover, they lived among the pagans and did not form a separate suburb as in the case of Vilnius.²⁸

The Kriveikiškis burial ground was considered a unique case for a long time because it was located in the pagan centre of Lithuania. However, the situation changed in 2005 when a burial site with inhumation graves was discovered on 6 Bokšto Street in Vilnius.²⁹ The burial ground and its material record

20 A. Luchtanas, G. Vėlius, *Laidosena Lietuvoje...*, p. 85.

21 A. Luchtanas, G. Vėlius, *Laidosena Lietuvoje...*, pp. 84–85.

22 G. Vėlius, XIII–XIV a. Kernavės..., pp. 383–398.

23 G. Vėlius, XIII–XIV a. Kernavės..., pp. 393.

24 G. Zabiela, *Laidosena pagoniškoje Lietuvoje, Lietuvos archeologija* 15, 1998, pp. 351–379.

25 G. Zabiela, *Laidosena pagoniškoje...*, p. 354.

26 G. Zabiela, *Laidosena pagoniškoje...*, p. 352.

27 G. Gintautas, G. Vėlius, *Kernavės miesto bendruomenė XIII–XIV amžiuje*, Vilnius, 2005.

28 R. Jonaitis, I. Kaplūnaitė, *Senkapis Vilniuje, Bokšto gatvėje...*, p. 44.

29 R. Jonaitis, I. Kaplūnaitė, *Senkapis Vilniuje, Bokšto gatvėje...*, p. 46.

are associated with the Orthodox tradition. From the very beginning of the investigations at this site, the discoveries were continuously published and made available to the scientific community. The first articles were aimed at presenting the archaeological excavations at the site³⁰ and describing the groups of grave goods, including chaplets and devotional items.³¹ In these studies, the archaeological data are interpreted in the light of the archaeological context and the political situation of the 13th–14th century; the data are also compared with the burial records of ethnically related burial sites in Lithuania, such as the one at Kriveikiškis. The discoveries made during the archaeological excavations made it possible to determine the chronology of the burial ground, discuss the confessional affiliation of the deceased, and compare the burial record of Kriveikiškis in Kernavė with other contemporary burial grounds in Lithuania. A detailed analysis of the historiography concerning the burial site on Bokšto Street is available in a dedicated monograph,³² therefore its details will not be discussed any further.

The third urban burial monument to be discussed is the burial ground in Latako Street, in Vilnius. It was excavated between 1980 and 1981 as part of research led by Gediminas Gendrėnas. Some references to this burial ground have been made by other researchers in their work. However, the discoveries made at the site have hardly been published; as such,

the investigation results will be discussed in more detail below. The burial site on Latako Street dates from after the official baptism of 1387, while its material record is used to demonstrate the non-Christian character of the burial site on Bokšto Street. This is done through a comparison of the material record of these two burial sites, with a special emphasis on the rare grave goods, and by arguing that the burial sites of Bokšto and Latako streets are contemporaneous.³³ However, a closer examination of the material recovered on Latako Street shows that the Latako burial site does not fit into the context of the Kriveikiškis and Bokšto Street burial sites; all the data indicate that it dates from a later period and conforms more strictly to the Christian tradition.

The historiography of the burial ground located on Latako Street is very limited. There are several reasons for this. A complete archaeological report has never been published;³⁴ the site has not received much attention until recent years with consideration of its significance in the context of the development of the city of Vilnius. However, historians have repeatedly referred to the Church of St Nicholas (Uspenia) and its association with the burial site on Latako Street. In the historiography³⁵ dedicated to both early Vilnius and characteristics of burial features dating from the transitional period, attention is paid not to the burial ground itself, but to the archaeological horizons located beneath it. The researchers have mostly

30 R. Jonaitis, Noveishie raskopki na territorii „CIVITAS RUTENICA“ v Vil'niuse: predvoritel'nyi analiz rezul'tatov, *AIPPPZ* 54, 2009, pp. 414–425; R. Jonaitis, Obschina Russkogo goroda 13–14 vv. v Vil'niuse v svete noveishikh arheologicheskikh otkrytii, *AIPPPZ* 55, 2011, pp. 171–178; R. Jonaitis, Raskopki na territorii «Civitas Rutenica». Prodolzhenie issledovaniia, *AIPPPZ* 57, 2011, pp. 232–235; R. Jonaitis, Issledovaniia na «Civitas Rutenica» v 2011 g. Proverka teorii, *AIPPPZ* 58, 2013, pp. 380–383; R. Jonaitis, Issledovaniia na territorii „Civitas Rutenica“ v Vil'niuse v 2012 g. (Ne)ozhidanye otkrytia, *AIPPPZ* 59, 2014, pp. 343–348.

31 R. Jonaitis, Ob odnom siuzhete iz istorii mody v Litve (po materialam pogrebenii gorozhanok XIII–XIV vv.), *AIPPPZ* 60, 2015, pp. 309–316; R. Jonaitis, Golovnye venchiki kak indikator migratsionnogo puti XIII–XIV vv. cherez Kiev v Litvu, *Ukraina Lithuanica: studii z istorii Velikogo kniazivstva Litovskogo* T. IV, 2017, pp. 125–145; R. Jonaitis, Pravoslavnye devotsionalii v Vilniuse. Lokatsiia, datirovka i znachenie drevnerusskikh ėnkolpionov v kul'turnukh sloiakh goroda, *AIPPPZ* 63, 2018, pp. 334–346.

32 R. Jonaitis, I. Kaplūnaitė, *Senkapis Vilniuje, Bokšto gatvėje...*, pp. 46–53.

33 G. Vėlius, Mogil'nik XIII–XIV vv. v Kiarnave (Kriveikishkis): ėtnicheskaia prinaldezhnost' pogrebennykh, *Arkheologia i istoria Litvy i severo-zapada Rosii v srednevekov'e*, 2013, pp. 75–76.

34 Only four volumes covering three of the eight excavation areas are available.

35 Historiography regarding the burial site in Latako Street received a thorough overview in the 2023 article by: R. Jonaitis, (Ne)žinomas kapinynas Latako g. Vilniuje, *Archaeologia Urbana*, 2023.

been interested in the early cultural layer containing pre-Gothic pottery, above which there existed a churchyard. This fact is used as indirect evidence for dating the burial site.

When talking about the early urban burial grounds containing inhumations, we are not discussing the case of the Church of St Anne and St Barbara³⁶ and the burials that were uncovered near it. The reason for this is that both the church and the burials date from the period after the official baptism in 1387. The very first Church of St Anne was wooden; later, at the very end of the 14th century or the beginning of the 15th century, a masonry church was built in its place. Soon after the baptism of 1387, burials began being placed in an area located next to it. Archaeological excavations at the site were carried out by Adolfas Tautavičius.³⁷ Notably, the material obtained from this burial site is covered in greater length in a monograph by Oksana Valionienė.³⁸

Another burial site that can be ‘tentatively’ included in the list of urban burial monuments³⁹ is located near Vilnius, in Verkiai.⁴⁰ Here, 11 graves have been discovered. The leader of the investigations Robertas Žukovskis points out that the deceased were interred following the Christian tradition - without cremation and facing west.⁴¹ Some burials, however, do not fit within the Christian context as they contain grave goods such as a battle axe and a spearhead.⁴² It should be noted that these artefacts lay within 50

centimetres of the burial, so their affiliation is questionable.⁴³ Based on finds and their similarity to the material record of the burial site at Kriveikiškis, the author of the investigations dated the burial site at Verkiai to between the end of the 13th century (?) and the 14th century.⁴⁴ In 2012, radioactive carbon analysis was carried out on burial 11 as it contained the richest material record. The date obtained falls between 1255 and 1387 calAD.⁴⁵ Thus, on the basis of the available material, it can be assumed that the inhumation burials at Verkiai also belong to the period before the official baptism. However, excavations on this site have not been completed. Questions about the boundaries of the burial site, its total area, density and how long it was used remain unanswered.⁴⁶ In order to avoid any speculation, no conclusions will be drawn at this stage, neither about the community that rests here in Verkiai nor about the relationship of the cemetery to the city during the period in question.

Other urban burial grounds are also known. Two of them are located in the former lands of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, in present-day Belarus: Halshany (Alšėnai) and Volkovysk. The material from these burial grounds is very similar to that of the Lithuanian urban burial grounds. Unfortunately, the historiography on them is limited.

In Alšėnai, archaeological investigations have been ongoing for more than a century.⁴⁷ It is located in the northwestern part of present-day Belarus, some

36 Located within the territory of the Lower Castle of Vilnius.

37 A. Tautavičius, *Archeologinių kasinėjimų Vilniuje Gedimino kalno šiaurinėje papėdėje, buvusios Žemutinės pilies teritorijoje dienoraštis (1957.IV.24–1957.XI.2)*, 1957, *LIIBR*, f. 1, b. 65; A. Tautavičius, *Ataskaita už archeologinius kasinėjimus Vilniaus Žemutinės pilies teritorijoje, Gedimino kalno šiaurinėje papėdėje, vykdytus 1958.V.5–X.6*, 1958, *LIIBR*, f. 1, b. 104.

38 O. Valionienė, *Viduramžių Vilniaus erdvės evoliucija (XIII a. vidurys – XVI a. pirmas ketvirtis)*, Vilnius, 2019, pp. 111–113.

39 It is most likely a peripheral burial ground, which, over time, became part of the city.

40 R. Žukovskis, *Senkapis Verkių dvaro sodybos teritorijoje*, *ATL 2008 metais*, 2009, pp. 171–180.

41 R. Žukovskis, *Senkapis Verkių dvaro...*, p. 179.

42 R. Žukovskis, *Senkapis Verkių dvaro...*, p. 176.

43 R. Žukovskis, *Senkapis Verkių dvaro...*, p. 176.

44 R. Žukovskis, *Senkapis Verkių dvaro...*, p. 176.

45 R. Jonaitis, *Civitas Rutenika Vilniuje...*, p. 124.

46 R. Žukovskis, *Senkapis Verkių dvaro...*, p. 179.

47 P. Ken'ko, *Gol'shanskie mogil'niki (topografia, khronologia, istoria izuchenia)*, *Materialy pa arkeologii Belarusi* № 31, 2020, pp. 48–58.

70 kilometres from Vilnius. Several burial monuments are known in and around Alšėnai, both barrow sites and flat burial sites that contain cremation and inhumation burials.⁴⁸ Five groups of barrows have been discovered northeast of Alšėnai that date back to the tenth to the 13th centuries. One more barrow site is located to the northwest, dating from the fifth to the 11th centuries.⁴⁹ Two flat burial sites are also known in Alšėnai, one of which was discovered in 2012 to the south of a hillfort and dated to the 13th–14th centuries; some of the burials found there were inhumations, while others contained cremations.⁵⁰ The burial site of interest for this particular study is located to the northeast of Alšėnai castle and has links with the urban burial sites of Lithuania. The first excavations were carried out here in 1892, during which three burials were discovered. In 2019, archaeologists spotted illegal earth-moving works during the construction of a car park. The works were stopped and some of the valuable archaeological material was rescued from beneath the excavator bucket. As shall be seen in the cases presented below, the fate of this burial site and the one located on Latako Street in Vilnius is similar – in a bad way... To save the cemetery from complete destruction, five more burials were investigated in 2019.⁵¹ The graves were positioned to the east-west and were found to contain numerous grave goods that appeared to be very similar to artefacts recovered in Kernavė and Vilnius. The finds included three chaplets adorned with silver gilded plates, a pair of beaded temple rings, a

hollow ring with a glass inlay, four rings with a plaited front, a symbolic key, and an iron knife.⁵² Sherds of household pottery were found at the bottom of burial pits and were dated to the 11th and 12th centuries. Pottery finds are associated with an earlier phase of the burial site when the deceased were buried cremated.⁵³ It is disappointing that one can only speculate what would have been discovered if the entire burial ground had been investigated by archaeologists, or at least if its boundaries had been defined, as was achieved in the case of Kernavė. Unfortunately, the future of the burial site or the possibility for further archaeological investigations is uncertain: a paved car park has already been built over the burial site. The author of investigations at Alšėnai suggests that the material recovered from the inhumation burials reflects elements of the transitional period and can be dated to the 13th–14th centuries.⁵⁴

In Volkovysk (Belarus), a burial site dating from the transitional period was investigated in 2005. It is located on a hill, not far from a hillfort.⁵⁵ The investigations revealed 13 inhumation burials, recorded at a depth of 40–60 centimetres below ground level. The predominant orientation was east-west, with slight deviations to the northwest and southwest. The deceased were buried in the supine position, some of them in wooden coffins.⁵⁶ A few graves contained stones which researchers believe to be grave markers that were originally placed on the former ground surface.⁵⁷ The graves contained very few grave goods, these include a ring with a widened front and

48 P. Ken'ko, *Gol'shanskie mogil'niki ...*, p. 48.

49 P. Ken'ko, *Gol'shanskie mogil'niki ...*, p. 55.

50 P. Ken'ko, *Gol'shanskie mogil'niki ...*, p. 55.

51 P. Ken'ko, *Gol'shanskie mogil'niki ...*, pp. 55–57.

52 P. Ken'ko, *Gol'shanskie mogil'niki ...*, pp. 55–56.

53 P. Ken'ko, *Gol'shanskie mogil'niki ...*, p. 55.

54 P. Ken'ko, *Gol'shanskie mogil'niki ...*, p. 57.

55 S. Kalicki, H. Semianchuk, *Mediaeval burial-ground in Volkovysk (Hrodna district, Belarus) – first results*, *Sprawozdania Archeologiczne* 58, 2006, pp. 543–556.

56 S. Kalicki, H. Semianchuk, *Mediaeval burial-ground...*, p. 545.

57 S. Kalicki, H. Semianchuk, *Mediaeval burial-ground...*, p. 546.

two cast rings with imitation of weaving. The burial site dates back to the 13th–14th century (15th?).⁵⁸ An interesting detail – a cut feature was discovered under burials 1 and 5, of which the fill contained an arrowhead from the eighth to the 13th centuries, as well as sherds of household pottery, typical of ceramics dating from the tenth to the 13th centuries of the Volkovysk hillforts.⁵⁹

An overview of the material from urban burial sites in present-day Belarus shows obvious similarities with the Kriveikiškis and Bokšto Street burial sites. However, due to the lack of research on these sites, it is not yet possible to draw any conclusions.

In summary of the Lithuanian historiography of urban burial sites dated to the transitional period, it is clear that this period is still a matter of much debate. Questions remain unresolved in terms of chronology, the presence of grave goods and the confession of the deceased. One can see how one argument is used to support opposing views, demonstrating, once again, the complexity of this period. In nearly 30 years of intensive research, archaeologists have not agreed on the key issues. We hope that future interdisciplinary research on urban burial sites will help to resolve at least the principal questions raised in the debate.

Did the emergence of the first cities create favourable conditions for the settling of Christians?

In the middle of the 13th century, Christians had not yet established themselves in the country, but it is known that they kept in contact with Lithuanians.

A greater influx of newcomers can be observed with the establishment of cities from the second half of the 13th century. At that time, there were only two urban centres in the territory of ethnic Lithuania that could be characterised by multi-confessionalism: Kernavė and Vilnius. Kernavė – the main residence of Grand Duke Traidenis, his presumed domain and the centre of his patrimony – was the first to emerge.⁶⁰

All this raises what we believe to be a key question – could the first Orthodox colonies in ethnic Lithuania be established under the monarchy of Traidenis? The establishment of political relations with Lev Danilovich shows that Traidenis was undoubtedly influential and powerful.⁶¹ It is unlikely that he Leo Danilovich would have been in contact with a duke who held no tangible authority. Although Traidenis had Kernavė as his main and most important residence, he was concerned not only with the protection of Lithuania's borders but also with the centralisation of the state.⁶² The need for educated professionals from other countries became even greater when the cities began to be established. This is clearly indicated in the later letters written by Gediminas.⁶³

It should be remembered that the early relationship between Traidenis and Danilovich was based on the exchange of gifts and mutual assistance. To understand all this, it is important to establish what this help was and how Danilovich's help would have benefited Traidenis. Human resources was one form of aid that could have been received from Lev Danilovich; the arrival of people would have had an influence not only on the ruler's entourage (the elite) but the rest of society as well, especially given

58 S. Kalicki, H. Semianchuk, *Mediaeval burial-ground...*, p. 551.

59 S. Kalicki, H. Semianchuk, *Mediaeval burial-ground...*, p. 546.

60 A. Dubonis, *Traidenis*, Vilnius, 2009, p. 165.

61 A. Dubonis, *Traidenis*, pp. 79–80.

62 R. Jonaitis, *Civitas Rutenika Vilniuje...*, p. 19.

63 *Gedimino laiškai. Chartularium Lithuaniae res gestas magni ducis Gedeminne illustrans*, Vilnius, 2003, p. 47.

that the everyday life of society was dominated by the influence from the East.⁶⁴

Another important question is who were these newcomers and how did they arrive in ethnic Lithuania? Alvydas Nikžentaitis identifies four main ways in which foreigners could have arrived in Lithuania during the 13th and 14th centuries: 1) as prisoners of war, 2) as refugees from lands conquered by the Teutonic Knights, 3) as clergy, and 4) as craftsmen and merchants.⁶⁵ The refugees arriving from the lands conquered by the Order (such as the Prussians) were settled by the ruler in the barren lands on the borders of Lithuania.⁶⁶ A similar situation can be seen in the case of the Yotvingians, who are mentioned in historical sources as having been brought to Lithuania.⁶⁷ Some researchers identify a clear trace of the Yotvingians in the archaeological record of the Kriveikiškis burial site in Kernavė.⁶⁸ Naturally, this raises another question: given that the Kriveikiškis burial site contained graves of *Orthodox* Christians (the emphasis is on the confession, not ethnicity), could the Yotvingians who presumably came to Kernavė be already converted to the Orthodox faith? Or, to what extent were they influenced by the Orthodox tradition? This is an important question for future research.

As Nikžentaitis noted, Orthodoxy was relatively popular among Lithuanians.⁶⁹ Relations with Catholics must have been tense due to the aggressive policy practised by the Order in spreading Christianity. Orthodox clergy were free to spread the faith

among pagans. The fact that all the brothers of Traidenis were probably Orthodox is a good illustration of this.⁷⁰ Later, during the reign of Gediminas, his sister was Orthodox and lived in a convent in Vilnius.⁷¹ Historical sources mention an Orthodox clergyman, Nestor, who in the mid-14th century was free to perform Orthodox rites in Vilnius, both among the ruler's entourage and in the city.⁷² It is assumed that the number of Orthodox clergy was small and that they did not have much influence on the ethnic situation. The confessional situation is a different matter. The number of Orthodox believers was relatively high, as evidenced by Jogaila's baptismal campaign during which half the population of Vilnius was baptised. The other half were already Christians - Orthodox and Catholics (although the latter were not numerous).

The merchants and craftsmen were the most awaited of all the newcomers and, as a result, constituted a large part of the community. In the case of Kernavė, all scholars agree that merchants and craftsmen lived in a separate settlement, in the Pajauta Valley. However, the question lacking agreement is the one regarding their ethnic and confessional affiliation. Traidenis' words about the merchants under his authority – 'villagers and dogs' – indicate the low social status of these merchants under the ruler, they are often likened to slaves.⁷³ It is more appropriate to refer to these merchants and craftsmen who were dependent on the lord simply as *šeimynykščiai* (a class of patriarchal slaves in the Grand Duchy of

64 A. Nikžentaitis, *Nuo Daumanto iki Gedimino. Iki krikščioniškos Lietuvos visuomenės bruožai: monografija. Acta Historica Universitatis Klaipedensis*, Klaipėda, 1996, p. 23.

65 A. Nikžentaitis, *Nuo Daumanto iki Gedimino*, p. 19.

66 A. Nikžentaitis, *Nuo Daumanto iki Gedimino*, p. 19.

67 A. Dubonis, *Traidenis*, Vilnius, 2009, p. 130.

68 G. Vėlius, *Mogil'nik XIII–XIV....*, p. 76.

69 A. Nikžentaitis, *Nuo Daumanto iki Gedimino*, p. 22.

70 It must be noted that the Galician-Volhynian Chronicle contains contradictions in the depiction of Traidenis' brothers, which led A. Dubonis to question whether they were really Orthodox or were only portrayed as such by the editor of the chronicle (A. Dubonis, *Traidenis*, p. 30).

71 A. Nikžentaitis, *Iki krikščioniška Lietuvos visuomenė XIII–XIV a.*, dissertation, Vilnius, 1999, p. 31.

72 D. Baronas, *Drevneishie sledy prebyvania russkikh v Vil'niuse, Slavistica Vilnensis. Kalbotyra*, 53, 2004, p. 162.

73 G. Vėlius, *Kernavės miesto bendruomenė....*, p. 90; Dubonis, *Traidenis*, p. 167.

Lithuania). The grave goods uncovered in the burial ground of Kriveikiškis prove that they were indeed wealthy members of society.⁷⁴

According to recent archaeological research and discoveries, the origins of Vilnius as one of the monarch's administrative centres can now be confidently traced back to the reign of Traidenis. After Kernavė, Vilnius was the ruler's second and no less important centre.

What was Vilnius like in the second half of the 13th century? The reasons for the founding of Vilnius were neither economic nor theocratic.⁷⁵ As studies increasingly draw on archaeological evidence, it is becoming clear that trade was not the decisive factor in early Medieval urbanisation.⁷⁶ It seems that it was the ruler who initiated the formation of the first centres, the foundations of the future cities where the Orthodox were later to be established. Regarding the beginnings of Vilnius as a future city, the best archaeologically supported theory relates to the reign of Traidenis (1267/1268–1282). The earliest construction at the northern foot of Gediminas Hill dates back to 1271, as determined by a dendrochronological analysis of timber from a building found above the natural ground level.⁷⁷

In the period between the end of the 13th and the beginning of the 14th centuries, Vilnius was divided into areas that were inhabited by different communities. There is no doubt that they maintained relations with each other. These areas were located on Gediminas Hill, at its northern and southwestern

foothills, in the Crooked City, and the area of the earliest settlement of the present Old Town, close to the trade routes leading eastwards. It was settled by Orthodox Christians.⁷⁸ The Catholic Franciscan mission was located at the southwestern foot of Gediminas Hill.⁷⁹ Later, around 1270–1280,⁸⁰ Catholics settled in a different suburb, known as Smėlynė⁸¹. The clear zoning of the city meant that communities of different faiths lived as if separate from each other, but at the same time, early Vilnius resembled a single entity made up of several parts.

The earliest traces of human activity, dating back to the beginning of the 14th century, have been found in at least two locations in the southeastern part of today's Old Town of Vilnius: 6 Bokšto Street and 2 Latako Street. In the case of the burial ground on Latako Street, the focus is on its earliest horizon, which predates the emergence of the burial site. The earliest cultural layer discovered in this area was dated by the author of investigations, G. Gendrėnas, to the 14th century.⁸² This cultural layer contained mainly pre-Gothic pottery dating from the turn of the 13th and 14th centuries, which differs from other types of pottery both in shape and fabric. The material used in this type of pottery differs from others in that instead of crushed granite, a mixture of coarse, gritty sand was used. This type of pottery is not typical of the local population but is associated with newcomers, in our case the Orthodox. According to researchers, the prevalence of pre-Gothic pottery suggests that the settlement was first inhabited by

74 G. Vėlius, *Kernavės miesto bendruomenė...*, p. 88

75 G. Vaitkevičius, *Vilniaus įkūrimas, Vilniaus sąsiuviniai*, t. I, Vilnius, 2010, p. 64.

76 G. Vaitkevičius, *Vilniaus įkūrimas*, p. 83, comment no. 34.

77 G. Vaitkevičius, *Vilniaus įkūrimas*, p. 51.

78 R. Jonaitis, I. Kaplūnaitė, *Senkapis Vilniuje, Bokšto gatvėje...*, p. 289.

79 I. Kaplūnaitė, *Vilniaus miesto katalikiškoji dalis XIV–XVI amžiaus pradžioje*, doctoral thesis, Klaipėda, 2015, p. 43.

80 R. Jonaitis, I. Kaplūnaitė, *Senkapis Vilniuje, Bokšto gatvėje...*, p. 282.

81 In the western part of today's Vilnius Old Town.

82 G. Gendrėnas, *Vilnius 1980–1981. 160 vietų Dailės instituto bendrabutis Latako gatvėje. Archeologiniai tyrimai. Plotas Nr. 3. Ataskaita, 1983 LIIBR*, f. 1, b. 1606, D. 5.

people with a distinct manufacturing tradition, possibly Ruthenians.⁸³ Above the early cultural layer was a layer of black earth containing fragments of wooden structures. Thus, no evidence is available to support the theory of the existence of a settlement north of the burial ground on Bokšto Street in the second half of the 13th century. However, the situation changed at the turn of the 13th and the 14th century, or from the 14th century, when the first settlers began to settle in the area of what is now Latako Street. This means that they first settled in an area located around 100 metres away from the place of burial. Human activity on Latako Street is retrievable archaeologically for the whole of the 14th century. At the end of the century, or as early as the beginning of the 15th century, a churchyard was built next to the Orthodox church.

The manner of burial in Bokšto Street reflects the Christian tradition; the chronology, location and historical context support the view that the burials belong to Orthodox Christians. The analysis of the archaeological data indicates that the burial site on Bokšto Street was a resting place for the Orthodox inhabitants of Vilnius. Some of the deceased buried here (although it is not possible to determine how many) may have come from the Ruthenian lands, some of which formed part of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania at the time. The Ruthenians who arrived here were just as much subjects of the Grand Dukes as were the pagans; the only difference being their confession. On the other hand, the deceased resting in the burial ground on Bokšto Street could have been

born in Vilnius as descendants of the newcomers. On the other hand, they could also be local pagans who had converted to Orthodoxy.

Characteristics of burial features during the transition from paganism to Christianity

Recent archaeological research has revealed that both cremation and inhumation existed simultaneously in the territory of ethnic Lithuania during the transitional period. Put simply, pagans cremated their deceased (building both flat burials and burials in water), while Christian newcomers interred their deceased in inhumation burials in an urban setting. Funerary customs of the transitional period are discussed in detail in the monograph dedicated to the burial ground of Bokšto Street⁸⁴ and the recent article by I. Kaplūnaitė.⁸⁵ Even though the debate continues in historiography regarding the question of whether a clear distinction can be made between pagan and Christian graves,⁸⁶ it is possible to identify certain characteristics within burials that help clarify their religious affiliation. The following is an overview of key features of Christian and pagan funerary traditions. In a Christian burial, we typically find that the deceased are buried uncremated, the orientation of the remains is in an east-west direction (head to the west, face to the east); burial in a pit, inside a wooden structure, the body is laid extended and on its back, arms crossed at the chest;⁸⁷ the graves are dug so as not to disturb or cut into other burials,

83 K. Katalynas, G. Vaitkevičius, Vilniaus plėtra iki XV amžiaus, *Kultūros paminklai* 8, 2001, p. 72, footnote no. 16.

84 R. Jonaitis, I. Kaplūnaitė, *Senkapis Vilniuje, Bokšto gatvėje*.

85 I. Kaplūnaitė, Osobennosti khristianskogo pogrebal'nogo obriada v mogil'nike na ulitse Boksho v Vil'niuse, *Ekspedytsiya pratsiaglastiu u zhytstse: zbornik navukoykh artykulau pamiatsi Aliaksnadra Plavinskaga*, ed. M. A. Plavinski, V. M. Sidarovich, 2021, pp. 79–94.

86 R. Gilchrist, Transforming medieval beliefs. The significance of bodily resurrection to medieval burial rituals, *Death and changing rituals. Function and meaning in ancient funerary practices*, ed. J. Rasmus Brandt, M. Prusac, H. Roland, 2015, pp. 379–397.

87 More on the position of the arms, see R. Jonaitis, I. Kaplūnaitė, *Senkapis Vilniuje, Bokšto gatvėje*, p. 116; I. Kaplūnaitė, Osobennosti khristianskogo pogrebal'nogo..., p. 82.

although sometimes several graves can be found in one pit. Further, there are no burials that contain decapitated human remains; no grave good deposits or only a few; infant burials can be found; in some cases, burials are placed in crypts, central graves can be distinguished within a cemetery; and lastly, pagan burial sites can be found nearby.⁸⁸ Most researchers agree that these features are key in defining a Christian burial ground.⁸⁹ The most controversial issue is the presence or absence of grave goods: is the absence of them really a Christian feature? According to Aleksandr Musin, a researcher of Christianisation in the lands of Novgorod, there are several opinions on this issue: some authors argue that the custom of depositing grave goods persisted even after the introduction of Christianity. Others claim that a complete absence of grave goods in a grave is the norm of Christianity, while others argue that the presence of domestic artefacts in the grave is a certain indication of paganism.⁹⁰ Similar opinions exist in Lithuania as well. Deposition of grave goods is a distinct feature of the pagan burial tradition, which is found to have persisted in peripheral burial grounds well into the 17th century.⁹¹ In yet another view it is argued that the archaeological material from the late 14th to the 15th centuries in Lithuania and neighbouring countries does not contain, or archaeologists have not been able to find, any evidence of paganism or pagan symbols.⁹² Researchers of Lithuanian urban burial sites are not so categorical. Even though the

Kriveikiškis burial site in Kernavė is associated with the Yotvingians who were brought to Lithuania,⁹³ G. Vėlius also argues that culturally, the community of Kernavė was leaning towards the neighbouring Slavic cities.⁹⁴ Researchers of the burial site on Bokšto Street think that the burial customs that are traced here in Vilnius are typical of Christians. Thus, a hypothesis has been raised whether this burial site may have housed the remains not only of Orthodox newcomers but also the local people who had adopted the new Christian faith but had retained some of their old traditions.⁹⁵

It should also be noted that the pagan custom of cremation, which existed on the periphery of Lithuania at that time, was gradually disappearing under the influence of Christianity. The analysis of burial sites and finds confirms that the custom of cremation continued to be followed in some places in Lithuania after the official baptism in 1387.⁹⁶

In the view of the author of this study, the shift from cremation to inhumation can be linked to the spread of Christianity. There is insufficient evidence to suggest that such a significant change in burial practice was spontaneous or economically driven. Funerary customs are a very conservative subject – a major change would have to have occurred to cause such a shift in ritual, and it is Christianity that could be attributed to that change. This is not to say, of course, that burial is only associated with Christian newcomers or the baptised Lithuanian community.

88 D. Watts, *Christians and Pagans in Roman Britain*, London, New York, 1991), pp. 38–98.

89 A. Musin, *Khristianizatsia Novgorodskoi zemli v IX–XIV vekakh. Pogrebal'nyj obriad i khristiansie drevnosti*, S-Pb, peterburgskoe vostokovedenie 2002; T. Panova, *Tsarstvo Smerti Pogrebal'nyi obriad srednevekovoi Rusi XI–XVI vekov*, Moskva, 2004; R. Gilchrist, *Transforming medieval beliefs...*; R. Jonaitis, I. Kaplūnaitė, *Senkapis Vilniuje, Bokšto gatvėje*.

90 A. Musin, *Khristianizatsia Novgorodskoi zemli*, p. 42.

91 V. Urbanavičius, *Senųjų tikėjimų relikvai Lietuvoje...*, p. 77; V. Urbanavičius, *Senųjų tikėjimų relikvai Lietuvoje XV–XVII amžiais (2. Pagonybės Liekanos Pakalniškiuose XVI–XVII amžiais)*, *MAD'A*, 4 (49), 1974, pp. 71–80; V. Urbanavičius, *Senųjų tikėjimų relikvai Lietuvoje XV–XVII amžiais (3. Laidojimo papročiai Uliūnuose XVI–XVII amžiais)*, *MAD'A*, 1 (50), 1975, pp. 51–62.

92 E. Svetikas, *Lietuvos Didžiosios Kunigaikštystės christianizacija*, p. 457.

93 G. Vėlius, *Kernavės miesto bendruomenė*, p. 23.

94 G. Vėlius, *Kernavės miesto bendruomenė*, p. 90.

95 R. Jonaitis, *Obschina Russkogo goroda...*, p. 235.

96 G. Petrauskas, *Laidosena viduramžių Lietuvoje...*

It is about pagans being introduced to Christianity, about individual events of christening, about the 'first signing' (by the cross).⁹⁷ The custom of inhumation gradually spread among the pagan community. Thus, the author of the study believes that the practice of inhumation was a direct result of the influence of Christianity.

Archaeological data from urban burial sites

Three urban burial sites are known in Lithuania, including the Kriveikiškis burial site in Kernavė and Bokšto and Latako burial sites in Vilnius. The best studied in this case is the burial ground on Bokšto Street. As the site was to be fully redeveloped, every effort was made to excavate the entire site to the fullest extent. The second best-researched burial ground is the Kriveikiškis burial ground in Kernavė. Here, the aim was to determine the boundaries of the burial ground without full excavation. The least is known about the burial site on Latako Street, where an attempt was made to rescue the unique archaeological material from under the excavator's bucket, in the literal sense of the phrase.

The following is a brief overview of the main statistics on these burial sites.⁹⁸

The maximum area of the burial ground on Bokšto Street could be about 2,500 square metres (Fig. 1). A total of 533 burials were investigated:⁹⁹

these were all inhumations, laid in a supine position;¹⁰⁰ a quarter of the remains were interred in wooden constructions. The spatial position of the body could be determined in 435 graves (81%). In 395 of these graves, the deceased were buried in an exact or near-exact east-west direction.¹⁰¹ The number of burials containing grave goods was comparatively small: 53, or almost 10% of the total. The grave goods included finger rings of various types (40), chaplets (21), earrings (8), and bracelets (5).¹⁰²

The aim of research on the Kriveikiškis burial ground in Kernavė was to determine the boundaries of the burial ground (a cross-shaped trench was excavated, covering an area of 1,272 square metres). Thus, the preliminary measurements estimate that the burial ground could have extended over at least 5,338 square metres (Fig. 2).¹⁰³ As such, the burial ground of Kriveikiškis is twice as large as the site on Bokšto Street. The scale of the Kriveikiškis site can be explained by the fact that it had plenty of room to expand and the graves were placed over a single horizon (unlike in other burials sites where burial took place on several horizons). The burial ground on Bokšto Street was limited in space, the excavations revealed burials on several horizons, and some of the pits were found to have been reused. In the Kriveikiškis burial ground, a total of 292 graves were investigated, all of them were inhumations, with the deceased laid in a supine position. Some of the deceased were buried in wooden structures resembling coffins; traces

97 This is known as *prima signatio*, when a person may have been familiar with Christianity, but had not yet officially become a Christian and was living in a pagan environment.

98 An in-depth presentation on the archaeological record of Bokšto Street can be found in R. Jonaitis, I. Kaplūnaitė, *Senkapis Vilniuje, Bokšto gatvėje*; a monograph dedicated to the Kriveikiškis burial ground in Kernavė: G. Vėlius, *Kernavės miesto bendruomenė*; an article presenting in detail the archaeological investigations of the burial ground in Latako Street: R. Jonaitis, (Ne)žinomas kapinynas..., pp. 209–237.

99 Four more burials were investigated later, after the completion of excavations in the burial site. These graves are nevertheless included in the statistics (J. Sadauskas, Vilniaus senamiesčio (16073) ir Vilniaus senojo miesto ir priemiesčių archeologinės vietovės (kodas 25504) teritorijų Bokšto g. 6 2018–2019 m. detaliųjų archeologinių tyrimų ataskaita. 2019, LIIBR, f. 1, b. 9177.

100 With the exception of burial no. 347.

101 R. Jonaitis, I. Kaplūnaitė, *Senkapis Vilniuje, Bokšto gatvėje*, p. 168.

102 R. Jonaitis, I. Kaplūnaitė, *Senkapis Vilniuje, Bokšto gatvėje*, pp. 198–201.

103 G. Vėlius, *Kernavės miesto bendruomenė*, p. 25.

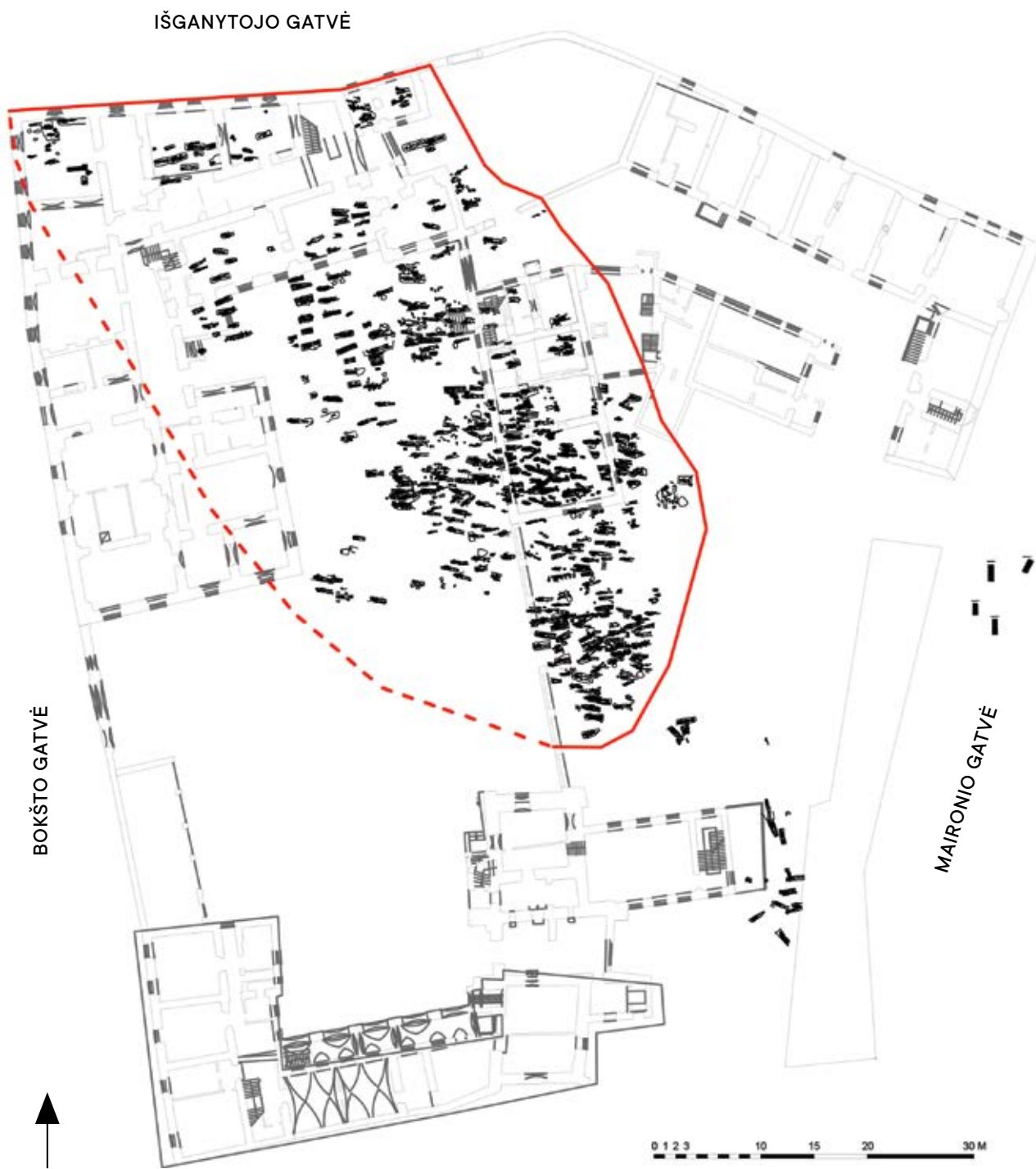


Fig. 1. Layout of the burials investigated in the burial ground at 6 Bokšto Street, Vilnius.
Drawing by I. Kaplūnaitė.

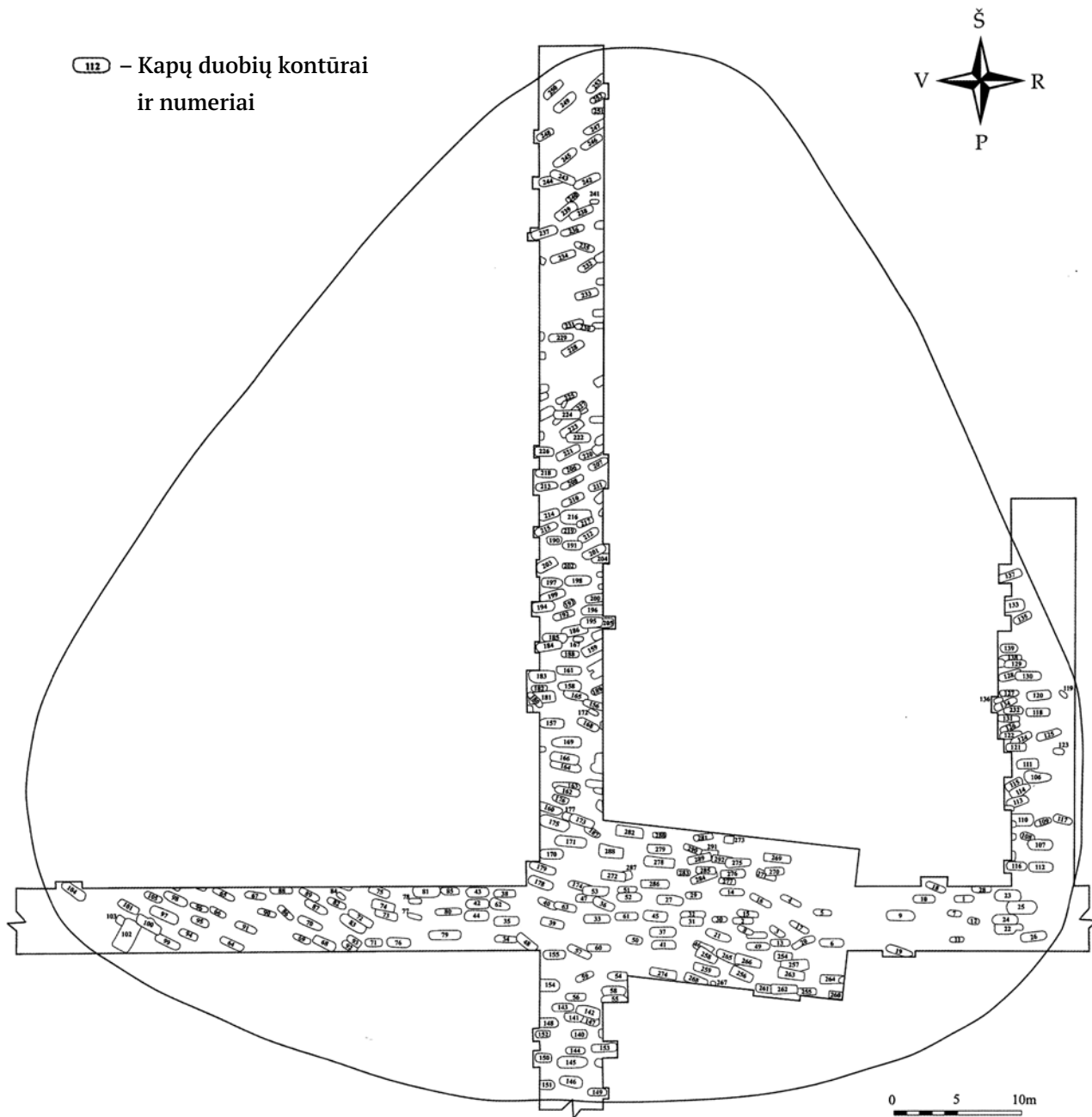


Fig. 2. Layout of the burials investigated in the burial ground of Kriveikiškis, Kernavė.
After G. Vėlius, 2005, 26.

of such wooden structures were found in 85 graves (29.1% of the total). The predominant orientation of burials was east-west, with the head facing west in 51.6% of all graves.¹⁰⁴ However, according to G. Vėlius, ‘this orientation was not always respected’ as seen by 76 graves (26%) that were oriented towards the southwest and 71 (24.3%) towards the northwest. Therefore, it can be seen that almost all of the graves were oriented towards the west, albeit with a slight deviation. The author of this study attributes such consistency exclusively to the influence of Christianity. The head of the Kriveikiškis excavations admits that this orientation of burials is related to Christian burial practices. Still, he doubts ‘whether the westward orientation of the dead in the Medieval burial ground at Kernavė was determined by Christian funerary practices’.¹⁰⁵ The number of burials with grave goods in the Kriveikiškis site is significantly higher than the number found on Bokšto Street. Half of the graves (50.35%)¹⁰⁶ contained a deposit of grave goods, including rings of various types (102); knives and their fragments (61); temple rings and earrings (44), chaplets (29), symbolic keys (17), and bracelets (13).

The third urban burial ground is located on Latakoto Street, Vilnius. The excavations on this site were carried out under extremely difficult conditions.¹⁰⁷ Nevertheless, the maximum amount of information was obtained. The digging (in these conditions, it cannot be called an investigation) was conducted over an area of 1,800 square metres (Fig. 3). Due to the subsequent heavy development of the site, and the difficult conditions under which the excavation was carried out, it is difficult to estimate the possible

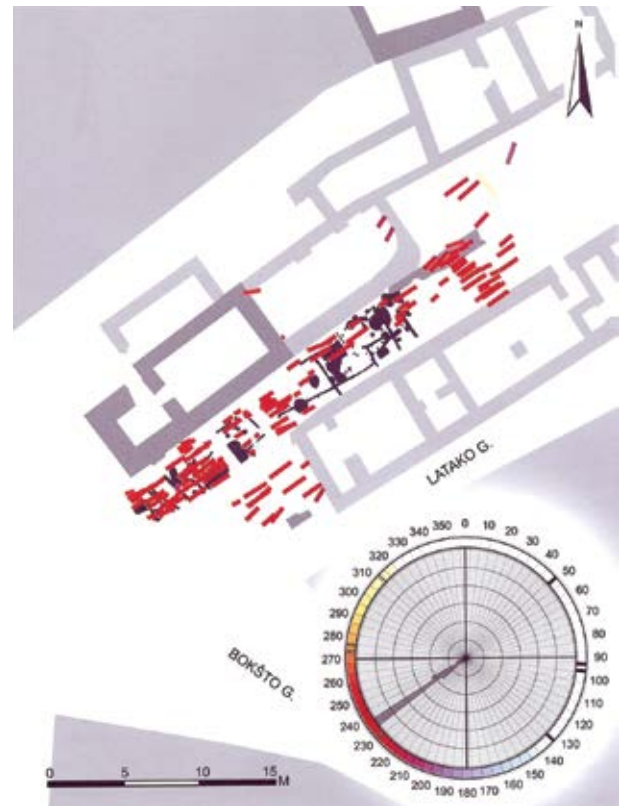


Fig. 3. Layout of the burials investigated in the burial ground in Latakoto Street, Vilnius. After O. Valionienė, 2019, 253.

extent of the burial site. During the excavation, 140 graves were uncovered.¹⁰⁸ According to Oksana Valionienė who analysed the layout of the burial site, ‘its distinctive feature is that it follows a very strict orientation’.¹⁰⁹ The north-east–south-west direction was strictly followed, with very slight deviations.¹¹⁰ The question is, why was the east-west direction,

104 G. Vėlius, *Kernavės miesto bendruomenė*, p. 31.

105 G. Vėlius, *Kernavės miesto bendruomenė*, p. 31.

106 G. Vėlius, *Kernavės miesto bendruomenė*, pp. 40–42.

107 The investigations, such as they were, were carried out in a hurry and with an excavator bucket ‘hanging over the head’.

108 This study makes use of the reports and descriptions of the graves provided by the author of the investigations, for which we are very grateful.

109 O. Valionienė, *Viduramžių Vilniaus erdvės evoliucija*, p. 109.

110 The orientation of burial no. 44 was to the north-west.

which is typical of Christian burial, not followed in this burial site? O. Valionienė proposes that it would be logical to assume that a temple must have stood here.¹¹¹ According to her, the church and its churchyard were assigned to a pre-existing plot of land, with clear boundaries that followed the established structure of the district.¹¹² The consequences of this arrangement can be seen in the layout of the graves, which are arranged in strict rows, with burials on several horizons. All the graves, without exception, are inhumations, with the deceased laid in a supine position. The Latako Street burial site differs from the sites in Bokšto Street and Kriveikiškis in that a large number of coffins with nails were found there.¹¹³

Another distinctive feature of this burial site was the lack of grave goods (only 6.6% of the total number of burials).¹¹⁴ These included three rings (one with a glass inlay, one with a widened front, and one of a sash-like type); two beaded temple rings; two buttons in children's graves, a buckle, and a whetstone.¹¹⁵

The material from three urban burial sites in ethnic Lithuania can thus be compared, revealing their similarities and differences, in an attempt to answer the main question: what was the religious affiliation of the communities who buried their deceased here?

At first glance, all the features (with a few exceptions) appear to be very similar over the three

Table 1. Key statistics for three urban burial sites.

	Kriveikiškis in Kernavė	Bokšto Street	Latako Street
Number of investigated burials	289	537	140
Burial type	Inhumation	Inhumation	Inhumation
The predominant orientation	West	West	Southwest
Burial posture	Supine (98.26%)	Supine (99.44%)	Supine (100%)
Wooden constructions	29.1%	26%	40.71%*
Grave goods	50.35%	9.86%	6.6%

* It should be noted that many of the burials in Latako Street were disturbed and a high number of them were poorly preserved children's graves. As a result, it was not possible to establish the presence of wooden structures in all of them. It is, therefore, likely that the number of graves with wooden structures in this burial site is higher.

111 O. Valionienė, *Viduramžių Vilniaus erdvės evoliucija*, p. 109.

112 O. Valionienė, *Viduramžių Vilniaus erdvės evoliucija*, p. 109.

113 G. Gendrėnas, Vilnius 1980–1981. 160 vietų Dailės instituto bendrabutis Latako gatvėje. Archeologiniai tyrimai. Plotas Nr. 2. Ataskaita. *Lietuvos istorijos instituto rankraštyno biblioteka (LIIBR)*, f. 1, b. 1606 C, 1982, pp. 76–77.

114 R. Jonaitis, I. Kaplūnaitė, *Senkapis Vilniuje, Bokšto gatvėje*, p. 199.

115 G. Gendrėnas, Vilnius 1980–1981. 160 vietų Dailės instituto bendrabutis Latako gatvėje. Archeologinė mechanizuotų žemės darbų priežiūra (T.1), 1982, *LIIBR*, f. 1, b. 1606 A; G. Gendrėnas, Vilnius 1980–1981, 160 vietų Dailės instituto bendrabutis Latako gatvėje. Archeologiniai tyrimai. Plotas I. Ataskaita (T. 2), 1983, *LIIBR*, f. 1, b. 1606B; G. Gendrėnas, Vilnius 1980–1981, 160 vietų Dailės instituto bendrabutis Latako gatvėje. Archeologiniai tyrimai. Plotas Nr. 2. Ataskaita (T. 3), 1982, *LIIBR*, f. 1, b. 1606C; G. Gendrėnas, Vilnius 1980–1981, 160 vietų Dailės instituto bendrabutis Latako gatvėje. Archeologiniai tyrimai. Plotas Nr. 3. Ataskaita (T. 4), 1983, *LIIBR*, f. 1, b. 1606D.

burial sites. However, some slight differences stand out, such as the orientation of the graves on Latako Street with heads facing southwest. This can be explained by objective reasons, wherein the burial ground was ‘incorporated’ into the existing infrastructure and the orientation of the graves corresponds to the orientation of Latako Street.¹¹⁶ The position of the remains is the same in all three burial sites: all of the deceased were buried in a supine position (except in a few cases). Another distinctive feature is the burials in coffins on Latako Street. Here, it is referred to coffins as we know them, and not to structures that imitate coffins as those found in Kriveikiškis and Bokšto Street. The fact that coffins such were used here is indicated by the abundance of iron nails.¹¹⁷ Another marked difference is the quantity of burials with grave goods. The Kriveikiškis burial site is exceptional in this respect, with the Bokšto Street burial site having five times fewer burials with grave goods, and more than eight times fewer in Latako Street. So what conclusions can be drawn from this information?

The author of this study suggests that Kriveikiškis at Kernavė is the earliest of the three burial grounds, as it is still relatively rich in grave goods, the orientation of the burials is less strict, and the available data do not indicate that the graves are arranged in rows, which is typical of urban burial grounds. The Kriveikiškis burial site seems to reflect an intermediate type, i.e. a slightly earlier, less pronounced stage of the Orthodox funerary tradition. The Kriveikiškis burial ground may have been built as a resting place for the Orthodox townspeople. The deceased could have been Ruthenians, Lithuanians,

Yotvingians, or possibly other ethnic groups. The somewhat more relaxed tradition of Christian burial in Kriveikiškis can be attributed to the fact that Orthodox Christians did not form a large part of the population, living among pagans, and did not establish a separate suburb like the ‘Civitas Rutenica’ in Vilnius. Some of the people buried there may have been newly baptised, not yet rooted in the Christian tradition. Moreover, it is not known whether the Orthodox clergy were present in Kernavė to ensure the following of funerary liturgy. Of course, it cannot be claimed that the Kriveikiškis burial ground was exclusively reserved for Orthodox newcomers. Local Lithuanians, the inhabitants of Kernavė who had already been baptised as Orthodox, could also have been buried there. It must be added that, in addition to the Kriveikiškis burial site, a contemporaneous cremation burial site at Semeniškės is known in Kernavė. The latter probably housed the deceased of the town’s pagan community.¹¹⁸ The fact that hardly any weapons or tools¹¹⁹ were found in this burial site suggests that it was the common townspeople who were buried here rather than members of the elite or the military.

Next, in chronological order, is the slightly later Bokšto Street burial ground in Vilnius. Burial features observed in Bokšto Street suggest that these were Christian burials, while the chronology, location, finds and historical context point to the Orthodox tradition. These include the more strict orientation of the graves, burial in rows, in some cases in the same grave pit, and a small number of burials containing grave goods. According to the currently available material and its analysis, it can be assumed that the

116 O. Valionienė, *Viduramžių Vilniaus erdvės evoliucija*, pp. 109–110.

117 G. Gendrenas, Latako – Bokšto g. kapinės. Description of burial. Personal archive.

118 D. Baltramiejūnaitė, R. Vengalis, Tyrinėjimai Semeniškėse, *ATL 2009 metais*, 2010, Vilnius, pp. 99–105; R. Vengalis, Semeniškių kapinynas, *ATL 2010 metais*, 2011, Vilnius, pp. 124–127; R. Vengalis, *Kernavės senovės gyvenvietėje (16316), Kernavės senojo miesto vietoje (24567) ir Semeniškių senovės gyvenvietėje II (24574) (Širvintų r.) 2010 m. vykdytų archeologinių tyrinėjimų ataskaita*, 2013, LIIBR, f. 1, b. 5940.

119 A combat knife was found in this burial site, in burial no. 160 of a man aged 18–20 (G. Vėlius, *Kernavės miesto bendruomenė*, p. 81).

burials in Bokšto Street belong to deceased of the Orthodox inhabitants of Vilnius. Some of the deceased buried here (although it is not yet possible to say how many) must have come from the Ruthenian lands that were part of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania at that time. The Ruthenians who arrived here were just as much of the Grand Dukes as were the pagans; the only difference being their confession. It is also possible that the deceased resting in the burial ground on Bokšto Street were born in Vilnius as descendants of newcomers or local pagans who had converted to the Orthodox faith.

The latest of the three case studies is the burial site located on Latako Street, in Vilnius. The graves that were discovered at this site reflect rooted Christian traditions. It was a churchyard, built next to the former Church of St Nicholas (Uspenia). The graves

investigated here represent strict adherence to Christian customs, as reflected by the consistency in the orientation of burials, the use of wooden coffins with nails, the presence of masonry crypts, and the very limited number of grave goods.

The most recent data, therefore, suggests that the burial sites on Latako and Bokšto streets in Vilnius may date from the same period. Both cemeteries were in operation at the beginning of the 15th century, that is, after the official baptism. The only difference between them is that the period marked the end of the cemetery on Bokšto Street and the beginning of the Latako Street cemetery. The possibility that the construction of the Latako Street cemetery was one of the reasons for the end of the burials on Bokšto Street should not be ruled out either.

Abbreviations

AIPPZ – Arkheologia i istoria Pskova i Pskovski zemli

(Archaeology and history of Pskov and the Pskov Land)

ATL – Archeologiniai tyrinėjimai Lietuvoje (Archaeological Investigations in Lithuania)

LIIBR – Lietuvos istorijos instituto bibliotekos rankraštynas

(The Manuscript Library of the Lithuanian Institute of History)

MAD'A – Mokslų akademijos darbai, A serija (Works of the Academy of Sciences, Series A)

KU – Klaipėdos universitetas (Klaipėda University)

VU – Vilniaus universitetas (Vilnius University)

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Krikščionys pagoniškoje aplinkoje. XIII–XV a. pr. miestietiški Viduramžių kapinynai Lietuvoje

Rytis Jonaitis

XX a. pabaigoje atradus griautinį Kernavės Kriveikiškio kapinyną, prasidėjo domėjimasis pereinamojo laikotarpio iš pagonybės į krikščionybę miestietiško laidojimo paminklų tyrimais. Buvo prisiminti ir 1980–1981 m. tyrimai Vilniuje, Latako gatvėje. O XXI a. pradžioje aptikus griautinį kapinyną Vilniuje, Bokšto g., pavyko atsakyti į tyrėjams rūpimą klausimą – kur ir kaip buvo laidojami miestuose besikuriantys krikščionys. Nors visi trys kapinynai yra beveik vienalaikiai, juose aptikta ir esminių skirtumų, išskiriančių juos tiek iš visų kapinynų, tiek vienas nuo kito.

Tai, kad būtent miestuose aptikti tokie kapinynai, yra dėsningas. Lietuvos valdovai suprato krikščionių teikiamą naudą, garantavo atvykėliams krikščionims tikėjimo laisvę. Katalikus reikėjo kviesti, o rusėniškų žemių gyventojų, patekusių į LDK įtaką, kviesti nereikėjo – jie buvo tokie patys didžiojo kunigaikščio pavaldiniai, jo šeimynykščiai. Trys miestietiški Lietuvos kapinynai atspindi pereinamojo laikotarpio vėlyviausio etapo raidą.

Panašių kapinynų aptinkama ir dabartinės Baltarusijos teritorijoje – Valkavyske ir Alšėnuose. Neabejojame, kad tokių miestietiško laidosenos paminklų rusėniškoje LDK žemėse būta ir daugiau – ypač dabartinės Baltarusijos vakarinėje dalyje.

Ankstviausias iš visų šių trijų kapinynų yra Kernavės Kriveikiškio, kadangi čia dar gana gausiai aptinkama įkapių, kiek laisvesnė kapų orientacija, pagal turimus duomenis nematyti kapų išsidėstymo eilėmis. Kriveikiškio kapinynas tarsi atspindi tarpinį variantą, dar ne taip stipriai išreikštą stačiatikiškosios laidosenos tradicijų stadiją. Kriveikiškyje galėjo būti laidoti miestiečiai, išpažįstantys stačiatikių tikėjimą. Čia palaidotieji galėjo būti ir rusėnai, ir lietuviai, ir jotvingiai, galbūt ir kitų etnosų atstovai. Kernavės

Kriveikiškio kapinyne savo artimuosius laidojusi stačiatikių bendruomenė nesudarė daugumos, jie buvo įsikūrę tarp pagonių ir nesudarė atskiro priemiesčio kaip „Civitas Rutenica“ Vilniuje. Dalis palaidotų žmonių galėjo būti naujakrištai, dar per menkai susipažinę su krikščioniškomis tradicijomis. Be to, nėra žinoma, ar Kernavėje buvo stačiatikių dvasininkų, kurie būtų pasirūpinę griežtesne laidosenos liturgija. Žinoma, neteigiame, kad Kriveikiškio kapinyne buvo palaidoti išskirtinai atvykėliai stačiatikiai. Čia galėjo būti laidojami ir vietiniai lietuviai, Kernavės miestiečiai, jau priėmę stačiatikiškąjį krikštą.

Bokšto g. kapinynas Vilniuje yra jau kiek vėlyvesnis, atspindintis jau įsigalėjusias krikščioniškąsias laidosenos tradicijas. Kapinyno Bokšto gatvėje laidosenos bruožai rodo, kad jame laidoti krikščionys, o chronologija, lokalizacija, radiniai ir istorinis kontekstas pagrindžia, kad stačiatikiai. Dalis, kol kas neįmanoma pasakyti kiek, čia palaidotų mirusiųjų turėjo būti atvykėliai iš rusėniškų LDK žemių. Tuo labiau kad aptariamuju laikotarpiu kai kurios iš šių žemių pateko į LDK sudėtį. Kapinyne Bokšto gatvėje palaidoti mirusieji galėjo būti jau Vilniuje gimę atvykėlių palikuonys, taip pat vietiniai gyventojai, buvę pagonys, bet priėmę stačiatikių tikėjimą.

Vėlyviausias iš trijų miestietiško kapinynų, atspindintis jau griežtas krikščioniškosios laidosenos tradicijas, yra kapinynas Latako g. Vilniuje. Tai jau šventoriaus kapinės, buvusios prie Šv. Mikalojaus (Uspenija) cerkvės. Čia laidosena atspindi jau įsigalėjusią krikščioniškąją laidojimo tradiciją, kuri pasižymi griežtu kapų krypties laikymusi, medinių karstų su vinimis naudojimu, mūrinių kriptų būvimu, laidojimu su labai negausiomis įkapėmis.