

Session title: LATE IRON AGE AND EARLY MEDIEVAL GRAVEYARDS IN NORTH-EASTERN EUROPE: CONTINUITY AND CHANGE

Organizers: Aleksandra Rzeszotarska-Nowakiewicz, Institute of Archaeology and Ethnology Polish Academy of Sciences, Warsaw, Poland
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Time: Saturday morning

Room:

Session abstract:

In late Iron Age and early Middle Ages, a major part of North-Eastern Europe underwent deep changes in ethnic and settlement structures. This process brought about changes of cultural divisions and, therefore, also alterations on archaeological maps of this part of the continent. In archaeology, the main means to observe cultural shifts is through analyzing burial customs and creating, on this basis, a synthetic picture of a cultural zone. Such analyses have been undertaken for the above mentioned periods of time. However, such analyses have been limited by the restriction to tightly prescribed chronological phases, overlooking phenomena that extend across these phases. The organizers of this session aim to bring together scholars who deal with burial customs so that they can introduce their ideas in a wider territorial and chronological perspective.

Burial customs of many ethnic groups from North- Eastern Europe will be presented (Finns, Balts, Slavs and Germans). Furthermore, the impact of the change in religion on those burial customs shall be discussed. There is a possibility to observe not only the influence of Christianity, but also, among other, to study how the typical German customs were replaced by Slavic rites and how Scandinavian practices changed the burial customs of Slavs living at the southern coast of the Baltic Sea. The matter of interest includes inhumation and cremation, burial mounds and flat graves, graves build with earth only and those with complicated stone structures, and many other types.

The lately formulated theories lead us to expect to observe diffusion of some burial rites between ethnically and culturally diverse groups. This thesis should also be discussed.

All the above mentioned problems will be introduced by researchers from several European countries. The outcome of the session will, hopefully, present a new picture of cultural shifts during a long period of time and on a broad area. The publication of results in the form of a monograph is planned. We invite all scholars interested in these topics to take part in this session.

Paper abstracts:

INFLUENCES OF NOMADIC TRIBES ON THE 7TH CENTURY BURIAL CUSTOMS IN THE MAZURIAN LAKELAND (POLAND)

Tadeusz Baranowski, Robert Żukowski, Polish Academy of Sciences, Institute of Archaeology and Ethnology/Polish Archaeological Association, Poland

From the late 5th till the 7th century in the western part of the Mazurian Lakeland near the town of Olsztyn there existed a group (so-called Olsztyn group, in German: masurgermanische Kultur) the material culture of which was markedly different from that of the surrounding Baltic tribes. The artifacts were often of mixed character; their features derived from various, often distant, areas. At Tumiany, Olsztyn Province, 17 horse burials were uncovered. The majority of the horses were buried with pieces of harness. It is possible to attribute some of the burial customs and production of some of these artefacts to nomadic tribes (the Avars?). The same phenomenon has been recognized at other cemeteries of the Olsztyn group. Migrations of tribes changed the ancient political and economic situation in the Mazurian Lakeland. Traditional contacts and long-distance relationships were interrupted and trade routes fell into disuse. This was probably caused by the activities of not only nomadic people but also of the Slavic tribes. Soon afterwards the Olsztyn group ceased to exist.

PUBLIC SPACE IN THE GRAVEYARD AND SOME REFLECTIONS OF CULTURAL DIALOGUE

Mindaugas Bertašius, Kaunas University of Technology, Department of Philosophy and Cultural Science, Kaunas, Lithuania

Prehistoric society was closely connected with the world of death. Sparse historical sources tell us about place of social events near or in an extent of graveyard. The situation becomes more clear if we are operating with object of long time-span.

Marvele, as the biggest archaeologically investigated Lithuanian prehistoric object was taken into research for the discourse. The cemetery of Marvele (located in the Middle Lithuania) has been investigated since 1991, altogether graves are dated to 2nd – 12th centuries. Object provides abundance of different types of graves (inhumations, cremations, horse graves) as well as suggests some plausible interpretations for social events too.

Investigating archaeological past we recognize social practices which intended to consolidate members of groups, or to create and expose boundaries between members of families, groups. Both graves with individual (or sectional) funeral service and entire area of graveyard were used for this purpose.

One important aspect of public space was a phenomenon of competition, usually among leading families or competing groups. They are manifested in family attitude, when the family was seeking to display its high status, or desiring status. They are manifested even more expressive in the making of group identity.

At times we recognize special social practices in a certain place of the graveyard. They were intended to consolidate contacts between members of society. Community has used special small area for arrangement of different events. It could be the plane downhill in the river valley making some type of amphitheatre, where the graveyard (or a part of it's) were arranged. It could be a smooth elevation in the main part of graveyard, where the site of social events with particular equipment (like pits, fireplaces, ditches and other) were arranged. Sometimes it could be used a

pond with sporadically springing water for the same purpose. In some of cases we are identifying the traces of a big stone circle or a round pit.

That all arrangements are archaeologically identifiable, but who knows if the wooden constructions were made on the surface of the graveyard, or if the natural trees were growing in the area.

It seems that during certain rituals in the definite places of the same graveyard meanings were created, which might form the basis for cultural dialogue. The standardization of customs, the choice of place was an instrument for creating memory and making mental and emotional attitude of family or group member. The objects in the microlandscape and the objects used by partners in the social event provided communities with a common set of symbols. These symbols helped to create cultural boundaries between different groups.

HOARDS OR GRAVES? TWO UNIQUE MEDIAEVAL FINDS FROM SKOMĘTNO WIELKIE IN SUDOVIA (NORTH-EAST POLAND)

Mateusz Bogucki, Institute of Archaeology and Ethnology, Polish Academy of Sciences, Poland

In north-eastern Poland, on the historical territory of Yotvingian (Sudovian) tribes, in the village of Skomętno Wielkie, two silver finds were discovered accidentally in 1927 and in the 1940thies. They contained a set of silver ornaments, like brooches, armrings, bracelets, necklace and silver ingots. Ornaments from those finds are of local origin with some Scandinavian and South Ruthenian influences. Both finds may be dated for the break of 12th and 13th century. The lighter one were hidden in a copper bucket, and some burned bones were found on the top of the silver ornaments. Some premises suggest that burned bones were also in the heavier find.

The question on character of the discoveries wasn't a subject of broader discussion yet. Do we have two more or less typical hoards with deposited silver or are those finds graves with extremely rich equipment? The arguments supporting the second possibility are first of all the burned bones found in the first deposit. Unfortunately, the finders didn't recognized if they were human or animal bones. Also the ornaments from the first one looks like a set for one person – 2 identical brooches, 2 identical armrings, 1 complete necklace. Against the 'grave' possibility we may point out the richness of the set. In the Balt lands the typical grave goods are made of bronze or copper. The silver jewellery is very rare, specially in the Middle Ages. In such cultural context, the first find from Skomętno Wielkie, with more than half kilo of silver, would be one of the richest graves in the whole Baltic area.

In the case of the second find from Skomętno Wielkie the problem of its character is more disputable. The argument is that the finders used word Tonurne and Urne for describing the vessel containing the silver ornaments and ingots. This may indicate that there were some bones, but the finders, excited by digging out the large amount of silver, didn't recognized it as a important information. The content of the find may be against the 'grave' interpretation. If the 1 incomplete armring and 2 bracelets may be seen as a some kind of set, the 11 silver ingots doesn't fit as a grave equipment.

The question on the character of the two finds from Skomętno Wielkie is a open one. The high richness of the contents of both finds may indicate that they were hoards. For the grave hypothesis we may point out the presence of bones in

the first, and high possibility of their presence in the second one. Also the set of ornaments may support such interpretation. The possibility, that the finds from Skomętno Wielkie are unique type of graves in the whole Baltic region may be also supported by the fact, that in the 13th century this village was a residence of the Sudovian aristocracy. In the second half of the 13th century the Yotvingian (Sudovian) chieftain Skomand, originating from there, were fighting for almost 25 years against the Teutonic Order knights.

BETWEEN ARCHIVES AND FIELD ARCHAEOLOGY – THE CEMETERY OF GROß OTTENHAGEN/BEREZOVKA OF THE FIRST MILLENNIUM AD IN FORMER EAST PRUSSIA

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The cemetery of Groß Ottenhagen/Berezovka in former East Prussia (today Kaliningrad, Russia) was first investigated in the 1920s. Although, with few exceptions, the finds are thought to have disappeared with the rest of the Königsberg Prussia-Collection, the excavation documents were preserved in the estate of excavator Herbert Jankuhn and could be analysed, taking into account today's state of research. Because the find spot could be localized with the help of these archives, it was able to conduct follow-up investigations in 2003 and 2004. From the cemetery, 104 burials of the first millennium AD and 46 features – mostly of the modern period – are known.

The cemetery reveals three phases of occupation, marked by interruptions; in addition to the earlier Roman Imperial Period, or to be precise the transition to the later Roman Imperial Period (Phase B2 and B2/C1-C1a), these include the late Migration Period (Phase E) as well as the Early Middle Ages (10th and early 11th cent. AD).

In the Roman Imperial Period, inhumations as well as cremation burials with extensive stone protection are represented. In subsequent periods, cremation was practised exclusively; here too, in most instances, stones were used in grave construction. In all three periods, non-cremated horse burials occur. One special case, excavated in 2003, is a low barrow grave with a stone packing 7 metres in diameter and 0.5 metres high that held the rich cremation burial of a male and included – unusual for this area – the remains of two horses. The barrow was constructed in the transitional years between the earlier and the later Roman Imperial Periods.

The spectrum of grave furnishings, made accessible by the fine quality of the ancient excavator's drawings of the finds, reflects the forms typical of the western Baltic so called Dollkeim-Kovrovo-Culture during the Roman Imperial Period. The finds of the late Migration Period are only poorly described, so that evidence for this period remains limited; however, analogies may be found in the transitional phase between the declining Dollkeim-Kovrovo-Culture and the emerging early medieval culture of the Prussens. The finds of the third occupation Phase of the 10th and early 11th centuries derive exclusively from the modern re-excavation; they can be assigned to the Prussen culture.

Especially noteworthy is the successful, complete reconstruction of a general plan in very exact detail; it incorporates, as a result of the precise relocation of the old excavation trenches, all graves of the old excavations as well as those of the

recent investigations. The cemetery assumes, thanks to fine recording (despite losses) based on archival materials and their successful combination with modern investigations, a special position among the region's many older excavated cemeteries of the first millennium AD.

LATE IRON AGE BURIAL CUSTOMS IN ESTONIA

Marge Konsa, University of Tartu, Estonia

The burial sites of the Late Iron Age (11th–13th c.) in Estonia can be characterized as rich in variety in terms of both construction and the means of burial. There is a coexistence of, on the one hand, traditional elements of burial customs, and on the other hand varied and changing elements. Start from 12th century the inhumation start to prevail and the influence of Christianity rises. In the same time the stone graves of the Late Iron Age still carry on the traditional visions and norms of a burial place, which requires the use of stone, the cremation of the burial, and has its roots in the Bronze Age. One can suppose that the outer form of the burial places was meaningful for the community and expressed social symbolism, thus strengthening or defining social relation in the society. The question is what kind of symbolism or ideology it was?

In my paper I will give a general overview about characteristics features of the Late Iron Age Graveyards in Estonia. Still, mainly I will concentrate to the interpretation of the latest stone graves in Estonia, and discuss the social and religious background of the stone grave builders.

CONTINUITY AND CHANGE FROM THE BEGINNING: AN EXAMPLE OF NEOLITHIC CEMETERIES IN POLAND

Hanna Kowalewska-Marszałek, Polish Academy of Sciences, Institute of Archaeology and Ethnology, Poland

Continuity and change may be observed in various manners – one of them is analysing of the burial customs and funeral structures all over the world and during the different chronological periods. Several Neolithic burial places in South-Eastern Poland seem to be of particular interest for this purpose because of their long-time use: from the Middle Neolithic to the Early Bronze Age. They offer a possibility to observe the burial practices and funeral structures changing in time as well as continuity of using the same place by different groups of peoples. The internal spatial organisation of such cemeteries seems to be of special importance. The questions concerning nature and meaning of this kind of places thus arise, and several hypothesis may be proposed as explications, one of them pointing at stabilisation of space and formation of the territory by its inhabitants. So-called “tradition of place” of an inter-cultural character should also be considered.

SIMILARITIES BETWEEN THE FINNISH (1ST C. BC – CA 6TH AD) AND SLAVIC (11TH -12TH C. AD) BURIALS WITH STONE CONSTRUCTIONS: ACCIDENT OR CULTURAL DIFFUSION?

Marek Dulicz, Aleksandra Rzeszotarska-Nowakiewicz, Polish Academy of Sciences, Institute of Archaeology and Ethnology, Poland

The problem of the wide dispersion of graves with stone constructions in Eastern Europe, of their origin and diversity will be presented, on example of the Finnish Tarand Grave Culture and of early medieval cemeteries from Poland and neighbouring countries. The connections between the Finnish tarand graveyards and the most probably Slavic graves from eastern Poland, Lithuania and Belarus are going to be examined, with focus on the regularity and similarity of their stone constructions.

The tarand type graveyards can be predominantly found in the basin of the Baltic Sea, in today's southern and south-western Finland, Estonia, northern and north-eastern Latvia, and today's north-western Russia. This type of graves developed by adding to longer sides of original stone rectangles other such constructions. The bodies (cremations and inhumations) were buried inside the stone rectangles and covered with layers of earth and stones. The oldest tarand graves can be dated to the earlier pre-roman period. The youngest of such graves can be dated to the 6th century, although some might have been re-used as late as in the 8th – 9th century. In northern Latvia first tarands had occurred in the 1st and 2nd century AD and had been functioning till 7th – 8th century AD. It is sometimes believed that they might had been functioning also in the early medieval period, when no grave gifts have been placed with the inhumations. Estonian researchers connect the diffusion of tarand graveyards with the development of the Baltic group of west-Finnish peoples and with the formation of the eastern group of The Textile Ceramic Culture. The peoples creating the Tarand Grave Culture are viewed as the ancestors of the later tribes of Estonians, Livs, and other west-Fins.

During the early medieval time a very characteristic burial custom was used by people occupying the territory in the basin of middle Vistula, Pripyat and Nieman rivers (Masovia, central Poland, Podlasie (Podlachia) and „Lithuania”). They had been building monumental graves with stone constructions which created large stone necropolises. In Polish literature they have been called “mazovian type cemeteries”. The characteristic features are: predomination of inhumations with only few cremated burials, the occurrence of various stone constructions connected with individual graves, larger stone constructions creating intentional plans of the necropolises, location on tops of moraine hills, rich grave gifts, and location outside the centers of early medieval settlements. The oldest of those graves can be dated to the mid 11th century, the youngest to the 12th. Because of their outstanding architecture and relative rich grave gifts, these cemeteries are considered to have been used by the elite of the society. Whether it was a group of local people or a group of newcomers; did it include all warriors and their families from the neighboring lands or only some chosen members of the society; there is no doubt, nonetheless, that some of those people belonged to the local authorities. The use of inhumation suggests that the members of this society did not risk using cremation, which was popular among the pagan Slavs. It would be too speculative, however, to claim that this proves that the people building those cemeteries were Christians.

After the characterization of necropolises of both types, following questions will be addressed: is there a typological relationship between both groups of graves, is there a chronological relation, can the question set in the topic of this discussion be answered?

**PLACES OF CULTURAL CONTACT: FUNERAL CUSTOMS OF
MIEVIAL POLISH-RUS' FRONTIER IN ARCHAEOLOGICAL
REFLECTION**

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(abstract not received)