

The Excavations in Bajorai Cemetery during 2006–2009

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The cemetery – a 32 x 23 m gently sloping hill up to 1.2 m high – is located in marshy lowland between Bajorai and Šuoliai villages, on the E shore of Lake Briauinis (Elektrėnai Municipality). A melioration ditch (perhaps at the site of a stream), which is today choked with soil at the foot of the cemetery, led in the 19th or first half of the 20th century from the hill's N foot to Lake Briauinis. 300 m to the E of Bajorai cemetery is a height called Wolf Island (*Vilky sala*), 300 m to the S Silver Hill (*Sidabrakalnis*), and 1.2 km to the SE Vindžiuliai cemetery, which dates to the late 14th–15th century and is in a similar topographic situation.

Lakes Švenčiukas, Švenčius, and Briauinis, which have no outlets and are side by side, were one big body of water in the past, but the stages in its shrin-

kage and the formation of these lakes has so far not been precisely dated. Early 17th-century historical documents mention only Švenčius, which name means Holy Lake, in the vicinity of Šuoliai. The 1846 plan of the holdings of Kietaviškės manor shows Briauinis being connected to Švenčius by a stream, which today has been turned into a melioration ditch called the Holy Stream (*Šventė*).

In 1994, Ona Gudalienė, who lived in the neighbourhood of Bajorai cemetery, gave a spearhead from a destroyed cremation (found after an attempt to plough the cemetery after the melioration) to Olijardas Lukoševičius and Sigita Nistelytė, participants in the field expedition organised by the Centre of Ethnic Culture in Kaišiadorys. In 1995 this findspot was surveyed by Algirdas Girininkas,

A bird's eye view of the excavation of Bajorai cemetery. Photo by G. Kuliešius



Rolandas Gustaitis, and O. Lukoševičius. At the poorly defined site a test pit was excavated and cremated bones, ceramics, and over a hundred small metal finds and fragments of them were found. (The finds are stored in the Vytautas the Great War Museum in Kaunas.)

Since 2006 a Klaipėda University and Kaišiadorys Museum archaeological expedition has worked at Bajorai. At the close of the 2009 season, 25 trenches (a total of 270.7 m²) had already been excavated. The cemetery's grounds and Silver Hill to the S of it have been surveyed using a metal detector. All of the soil from the excavated area was screened or washed using 3 x 3 mm and 4 x 4 mm screens (two times in excavation areas 3 and 4).

The oldest archaeological finds, 912 flint artefacts, artefact fragments, and flakes, come from the Mesolithic – Early Neolithic. A bone awl and an oval bone artefact with no determined purpose were also found in the peat. The Stone Age finds, including a small oval flint axe, cores, knives, scrapers, burins, and microblades were scattered throughout the entire excavated area and occurred at various depths. All of these finds were covered with a thicker or thinner patina, were worn, and

many had been in a fire. Some flint finds may have been reused.

Half of a stone axe with a shaft hole (a characteristic Bronze Age find), which was discovered on the cemetery's grounds, probably found its way there circa the 14th century and is connected with images about the extraordinary power of thunderbolts.

Various sized fragments of hand made ceramics with rough surfaces (82 pieces), which were found at various locations in the excavated area come from the mid-1st millennium AD. A fragment of a cylinder-shaped clay spindle whorl characteristic of the late 5th–6th centuries allows the dating to be

A penannular brooch with zoomorphic terminals *in situ*.

Photo by V. Vaitkevičius



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The wetland excavation at the N foot of Bajorai cemetery.

Photo by V. Vaitkevičius



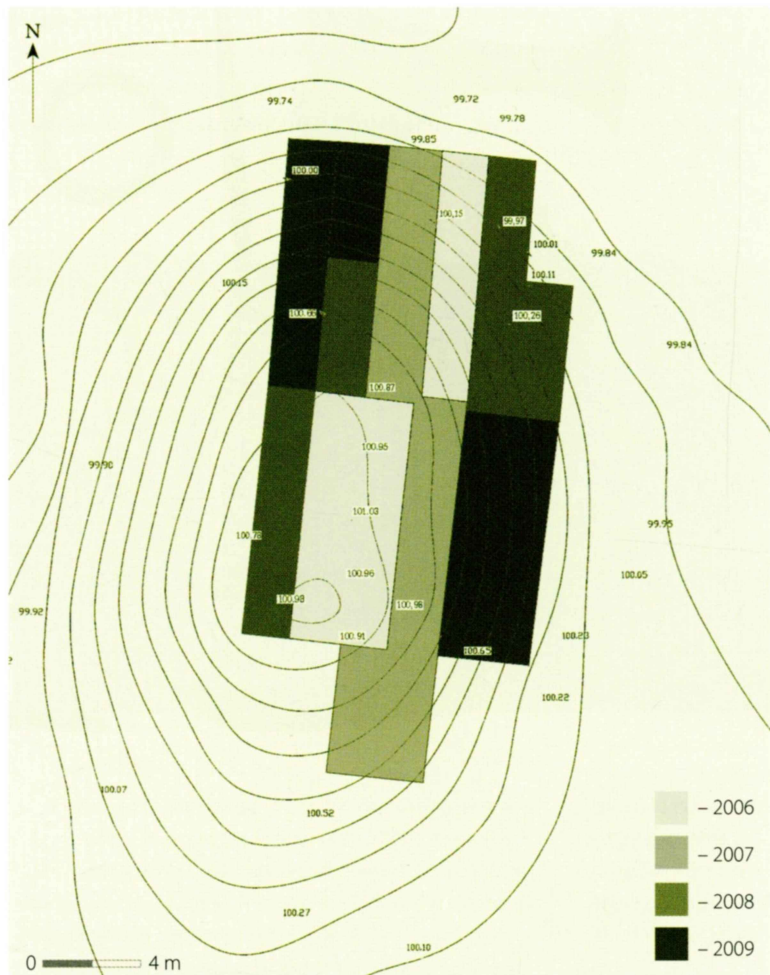
made more precise. It is possible that a massive stone – whetstone and a stone with polished flat areas need to be connected with these finds.

The cemetery's find horizon on top of the hill is a layer of sod and humus about 28–32 cm thick that is full of cremated bones, potsherds, iron, bronze, and other finds, which are characteristic of the 14th – early 15th centuries. The silver coin with the inscription 'ПЕЧАТ' that was found in pit. 7 and had been partially melted in a fire was minted c. 1392–1396 at the beginning of the reign of Grand Duke Vytautas.

In excavating the hill's north foot, the aforementioned cemetery find horizon became a layer of peat about 18–22 cm thick that was overgrown with bulrushes and had covered a 22–28 cm thick layer of black sand with small pieces of charcoal and ashes. Both the layers of peat and black sand as they progress down the hill gradually become thicker towards the N and run under the bog. Five wood and scoured charcoal samples were dated in a Vilnius laboratory to different periods from 170 BC – AD 60 (Vs-1783) to AD 1110–1290 (Vs-1655) (calibrated by Jonas Mažeika).

10.85 kg of osteological material, the bulk of which was cremated human bones, were collected during the 2006–2009 excavations. According to Rimantas Jankauskas and Laurynas Kurila, the specific morphology of the bones, i.e. small and tattered, hindered the bone tests. They have frayed edges and almost no epiphyses or other more brittle fragments (with the exception of the bones in good condition that were found in the bog). Diaphyses and cranium fragments predominate and teeth are encountered. There is currently no possibility of determining the minimum number of individuals. The identified bone fragments belong to all age groups beginning with children (the 2–10 age interval) and ending with adults (the over 40 age interval).

Burnt animal bones and animal bones untouched by a fire were selected for the 2006–2007 palaeozoological tests conducted by Linas Daugnora. The central bone of a canine heel and the canine tail vertebra found in pit 5 and the fragment of bovine tooth, the distal part of a carnivore's paw,



Plan of the 2006–2009 excavations at Bajorai cemetery.

Drawing by V. Vaitkevičius



A single-edge sword and a broad axe *in situ*.

Photo by V. Vaitkevičius



The position of Bajorai cemetery (on the centre of the photo) in boggy lowland in the shore of Lake Briauinis. Photo by G. Kuliešius

Some Bajorai cemetery finds: 1) a broadaxe; 2) a pendant; 3) a bracelet fragment; 4) a scabbard chape; 5) a belt decoration; 6) a wallet decoration; 7) a razor; 8) a ring fragment; 9) a knife; 10) a cruciform pendant; 11) an awl with a twisted shank; 12) a loop; 13) the chopped up shank from a silver ring; 14) a miniature bell; 15) a penannular brooch

(with one terminal deliberately broken off); 16) a belt fitting; 17) a staple holding a pendant; 18) a braided bracelet; 19) a miniature bell; 20) a belt buckle; 21) a key; 22) a limestone spindle whorl; 23) a miniature axe; 24) a fire striker; 25) a penannular brooch; 26) a saddle strap buckle; 27) a needle. Photo by V. Vaitkevičius and A. Kuriliene



and the canine tail vertebra found in the pit 7 should be mentioned. Bird, sheep or goat, and other unidentified animal bones were found at various locations in the cemetery. Three horse teeth found several meters apart in different trench squares were noted. They may be connected with isolated equestrian gear elements such as a saddle strap buckle, a bridle fitting fragment, a coil bead neck ornament, and a tail ornament.

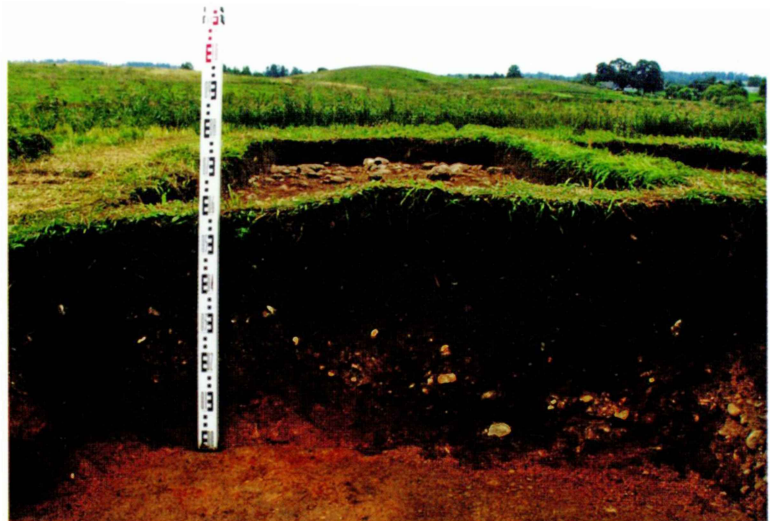
A total of 2 113 individual iron, bronze, tin, silver, glass, clay, and stone finds were found. Some of the artefacts were complete and easily identified, but the majority were fragments, i.e. artefacts, which had been broken (due to a custom of breaking grave goods) or partially melted in a fire, and drops of metal from bronze artefacts that had melted due to high heat. Their sizes ranged from several millimetres to tens of centimetres.

Among the various everyday items and tools, the following should be mentioned: 45 needles (only 3 complete), 36 knives, 36 razors, 20 staples (small U-shaped iron artefacts hammered into some wooden object), 19 awls (including 2 with twisted shanks), 18 keys, 12 closed-type fire strikers, 8 stone fire starters, 5 spindle whorls (including slate one), and 65 various iron and bronze rivets. It is difficult today to answer the question of whether seven fishing hooks may be connected with funeral rites. They are in good shape, have been in a fire, and one, which is especially thick, was found on top of sterile soil.

134 bronze and iron ornaments, most, apparently, mountings for decorating leather belts and another 11 for wallets, predominate among the ornaments and clothing elements. 67 miniature bells of various shapes, 41 penannular brooches (including ones with rolled, poppy head, thickening, mushroom shaped, faceted, and zoomorphic terminals), and 31 ring brooches (just one of which was complete and almost all of which were made of cast sheet metal) were found. 44 brooch pins were found without their brooch. 32 bracelets were found, only two of which were complete (one twisted wire, the other flat with rolled terminals). 42 rings of various types: band, braided, with a braided

head, and twisted, were found. A silver ring, the shank of which had been chopped into small pieces (seven were found) is especially interesting. The smallest weighed 0.426 g, the largest 0.987 g.

The humus layer on the top of Bajorai cemetery hill and the E – W (on the right) section of the pit for burial 7.
Photo by V. Vaitkevičius



Screening soil during the Bajorai expedition.

Photo by V. Vaitkevičius



0 ————— 2 cm

A reconstructed pot found
in Bajorai cemetery.
Photo by V. Vaitkevičius

Examples of hand thrown
ceramics that were found
in Bajorai cemetery.
Photo by V. Vaitkevičius

11 iron buckles (including ones decorated with silver), 6 massive loops, 11 small loops, 11 coil beads of various sizes, 4 bronze buttons, 6 tin beads fused together in a fire, and 6 glass beads of various types should be mentioned separately. Pendants, 18 of which were found, including three small crosses (two partially melted in a fire), had been strung on necklaces together with glass beads.

More weapons were found at the N foot of the cemetery hill than at its top. Seven socketed and one tanged spearhead, three broad and one miniature axe, and several, so it is thought, atypical arrow-

heads were found at the top of the hill in the central part of the cemetery. But in a submerged area at the foot of the hill nine broadaxes, five arrowheads, three socketed spearheads, and three pieces of a type Z single-edged sword were found. Somewhat further from the sword's blade (under it was an axe and above it a spearhead stuck vertically into the soil) were found an upper guard, a pommel, and a bronze scabbard chape.

At the same submerged N foot of the cemetery hill where these weapons were discovered, the edge of a large body of various finds was discovered (the body continues to the N in the direction of the bog) in an approximately 12 m² area in 2009. In this area were found *in situ* or washed out 655 g of human and animal bones, 190 potsherds (224 g) of hand built and, mostly, thrown ceramics, and 45 individual finds including a rectangular belt fitting known from previous excavations at the top of the hill, a key with a round head (and casting seams), a rivet, a miniature bell, the first ever found ribbed green glass bead, and fragments of a flat bracelet and fittings with various shapes.

Ceramics comprise another large find group at Bajorai cemetery. It has been asserted that the individual examples of hand built ceramics with rough surfaces belong to the mid-1st millennium, while 5 699 sherds (over 16 kg) of hand thrown or partly thrown ceramics come from the 14th – early 15th centuries. The size and degree of survival of these fragments differs at different cemetery locations. 3 386 sherds weighing 10.932 kg (on average 3.2 g each) were found at the top of the cemetery hill in 2006 and 828 sherds weighing 1.322 kg (on average 1.6 g each) in excavating the hill's E slope and N foot in 2009.

Some of the ceramic fragments were decorated with wavy or parallel linear designs. The potsherds belong to many pots and jars and do not fit together. Some potsherds were deformed due to being affected by high temperatures (in the flames of a funeral pyre?). Relief symbols, which were apparently on the bottoms of clay vessels, were noted. In all 13 potsherds with a symbol or traces of one were found. Whirling swastika designs predominate, the fragments of the other symbols being too small to be able to precisely recreate them.

Bajorai cemetery comes from the period of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. Its find complex is in large part known from previously excavated cemeteries at Rumšiškės (Kaišiadorys District), Obeliai (Ukmergė District), Kulautuva (Kaunas District), Kriveikiškis (Širvintos District), Žėronys (Trakai District), and elsewhere and from the investigation of the grounds of the Lower Castle (Royal Palace) in Vilnius. An exceptional feature of Bajorai is the thoroughly recorded stratigraphy and planigraphy in the cemetery's entire area due to which it will be possible to feel the principles and see the tendencies in the collective cremation layer, which will, for the first time, allow a thorough description to be made of the funeral rites Lithuania's inhabitants performed in cremation cemeteries on the eve of the introduction of Christianity and immediately afterwards.

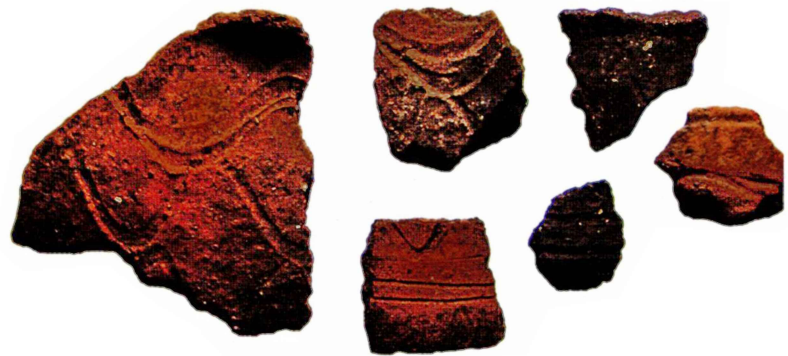
An additional intrigue was created at Bajorai by the fact that a burial site existed in the shallows of a lake, which was apparently once called Holy Lake. While awaiting the results of thorough laboratory natural science tests, it is possible to describe it today as a place, where fluctuating water levels thrust an island, which had been submerged, approximately one metre out of the water (but when the cemetery was in use, no trees were growing there).

In the peat at the N foot of this island, finds occurred at the first place accessible at that time when the lake's shores had already begun to become overgrown and boggy. The sources of these funeral rites were definitely religious and today it is clear that this was not a local phenomenon, but likely the opposite, one of the most distinct and most unique features of the old Lithuanian religion during a specific stage in the history of the Lithuanian state: the second half of the 14th – early 15th centuries.



Examples of hand thrown ceramics and a symbol (a swastika) on a pot base that were found in Bajorai cemetery.

Photo by V. Vaitkevičius



0 ————— 2 cm

During the Bajorai expedition.

Photo by V. Vaitkevičius

